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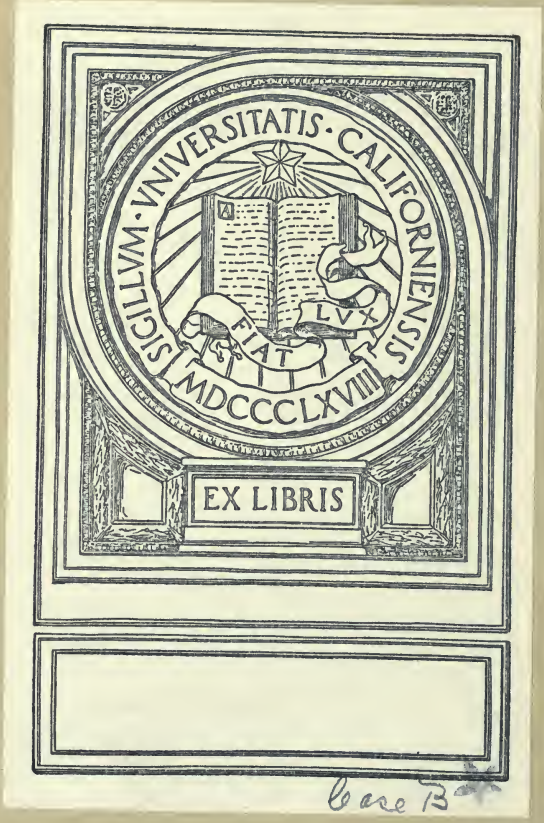

UNCLE WALTER.

VOL. III.

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UNCLE WALTER.

A NOVEL.

BY MRS. TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF

"FATHER EUSTACE," "THE BARNABYS," "MRS. MATHEWS,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

UNCLE WALTER.

CHAPTER I.

HAVING decided upon this, he turned his slow and melancholy steps towards the house, and as he walked he glanced his eye again over his painful letter; and then the latter part of Henry's communication awakened more attention than it had seemed to call for before. The first bitter thoughts which the letter had awakened about poor Kate, had made him feel as if everything else in it was only of the light nature of a jest; but now he became quite aware that the paragragh respecting Mrs. Fitzjames, deserved more serious thoughts. The extreme freshness and simplicity of Lord Goldstable, which would probably have excited nothing but

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ridicule in most people, had generated a feeling of kindly interest in old Walter; and he immediately determined to be a little on the look-out, in case the beautiful widow, whose appearance and manners he had observed, admired, and condemned on the night of Lady Augusta's ball, should venture to bring herself forward and take the field against the wealth and the wisdom of Lord Goldstable.

That the poor youth should be entrapped into marriage with such a woman as that, even without this episode of Captain Fowler, would be, in the estimation of the venerable philosopher, a very lamentable commencement of his young friend's adult existence; but the addition of this sporting accomplice in the attack, rendered the idea of such a marriage too detestable, to permit anything approaching to a feeling of indifference on the subject, to remain upon his mind. "He is, however, perfectly safe for the present," thought Walter; "and it will be time enough for me to begin my look-out when he shall be again within reach of this fair mischief."

Meanwhile, Lord Goldstable having risen and agreeably amused himself during the process of dressing, by anticipating an early morning call

at Doucham, prepared to descend and meet his venerable guest at breakfast. The ready, briskly-flowing young blood again mounted to the boyish lordling's cheeks, as he remembered that he must of course tell Mr. Harrington of the letter he had received, and announce to him that he was going to ride over to Doucham immediately after breakfast, in order to pay his compliments to his aunt, and the "lady who was with her;" and in order also to invite them both to come and pay a visit to the Abbey.

Had Lord Goldstable been required to state, in plain and intelligible words, why he disliked the idea of introducing Mrs. Fitzjames to Mr. Harrington, and receiving her as his guest while old Walter was his guest also, he would have been much puzzled how to set about it. Nevertheless, it is quite certain that he had such a feeling; and though it was equally so that he had conceived more love and respect for the old man than he had ever felt for any one living, he would not have been sorry if his venerable guest had greeted him with the intelligence that he had received news by that morning's post, which obliged him immediately to set off to London.

He got the better, however, of this feeling, sufficiently to meet Walter at the breakfast-table with a gay laugh, and to tell him, in a very sprightly manner, that he had news for him.

Walter's head and heart were at that moment too full of his own affairs, and of those of the sweet girl, who had decidedly become dearer to him than any one else in the world, to have power to make any reply to this beyond a vague smile, and the unmeaning words "Have you?"

"Yes, upon my life, I have," was the rejoinder. "My old aunt, Lady de Paddington, and a particular friend of hers, Mrs. Fitzjames, are come down together to the water-establishment, at Doucham. I did not think they were at all likely to grow so intimate together when I left town. However, there they are, together; and, of course, I must ride over to Doucham immediately after breakfast; and then, you know, I must invite them. You won't dislike it, Mr. Harrington, will you?"

Walter, notwithstanding the very slight degree of attention with which he was listening to the communication of his young host, started on hearing the name of Mrs. Fitzjames.

Lord Goldstable saw it, and felt half frightened, and half angry. "I thought, perhaps, that you would like to ride over with me to Doucham," said the young man. "It is a very celebrated place, you know."

He was vastly well pleased, however, when Walter replied, though with a ceremonious manner that was not usual to him: "No, my Lord, I cannot ride with you to Doucham, I am going this morning to Stanton. But, before we either of us start, there is a trifling matter of business that I could wish to see done. It would not take you ten minutes, my Lord."

"I know, Mr. Harrington, I know," replied the young man, exceedingly embarrassed. "You mean the letter I promised to write to Dr. Harrington? I meant to have done it before now, I did indeed. But I can't do it this morning, all in a hurry, you know. I must have time to think what I ought to say: don't you see? Give me a little more time, Mr. Harrington; pray do!"

"Whenever your Lordship pleases," replied Walter, gravely. "But you must remember, if you please, that our understanding upon that point was decisive, and that your shrinking from

the line of conduct upon which we then decided, would lead to very disagreeable consequences."

"Oh, Mr. Harrington, you can't think I want to be off—to be off writing the letter, I mean. I give you my word of honour that I will stick to the bargain we made about it. Trust me: will you trust me, Mr. Harrington?"

"I am quite content to do so, my young friend," replied Walter, touched by the earnestness of his manner, and kindly giving him his hand; "only we should remember, you know, that the young lady all this time—"

"Oh no, Mr. Harrington!" exclaimed Lord Godstable, eagerly; "oh no, Sir! not *that*. I am quite sure that Miss Harrington knows —that is, I swear, that she does not think —I mean that when I sat by her at tea the other evening, you know—indeed, I am quite sure, and you may quite entirely depend upon it, that she knows I don't mean to teaze her any more."

There was so much of honest, simple truth in this, that Walter, with all his sorrow, could not help laughing.

"Well, my Lord," he replied; "if you are sure that you understand each other better now than you did at your first interview, I dare say there will be no more blunders made between you. And now, my Lord, I must wish you good morning; we shall meet again at dinner."

"Good-by! good-by!" returned his young host, affectionately wringing his hand. "I almost wish you were going my way, instead of your own, for I always feel comfortable with you."

If Walter's first new walk across the old fields between Brandon and Stanton, had been saddened by thinking of Kate and her doubtful fortunes, his present walk over the same well-known ground, was sadder still; for now all doubt had given way to certainty, and it was no longer in his power to postpone the terrible duty of telling her that her bright dream of life was gone, and nothing but a dark reality left to take its place.

He now blamed himself severely for having so postponed it, and felt conscious that he had clung to a hope in which he had little faith, because it put off the dreaded moment of extinguishing—"it might be for long, or

it might be for ever"—the joyous brightness of the innocent young face that was so dear to him. He looked at the very least a dozen years older now, than he had done at his last visit to her; and no old acquaintance, had they met him now, would have exclaimed upon the extraordinary vigour of his steps, or the youthful brightness of his unquenched eye. He was putting himself to the torture from motives of the very purest affection, and yet he felt as if he were preparing to do the duty of an executioner.

CHAPTER II.

WALTER HARRINGTON succeeded in finding Kate as before, alone. James was again from home, and Lady Juliana had not yet left her room.

It needed but one glance at her uncle, as he entered the room, to assure Kate that some heavy evil was near. The genial, cordial smile, the fresh, open, hearty greeting were gone!

"My uncle!" she cried, "what is it?"

"Are you alone, my darling?" said he.

She nodded assent, but did not speak.

"Then shut the door," he said, "and come and sit by me, my Kate. I have something to tell you, which I know it will be very painful

for you to hear. It will cause you a bitter pang, dearest! But I thank God, it reaches you in time to save you from future misery."

"Uncle!" gasped poor Kate. "What is it? Speak the worst at once."

"My child!" replied old Walter, his firm voice faltering with painful emotion, "my child! The man who has stolen your pure affection, by false seeming excellence, is—a villain!"

"Frank?—Frank Caldwell? Uncle Walter, there is some mistake in this. You have been deceived. It is impossible!"

"Long and pertinaciously, my sweet Kate, I too clung to the belief that it was impossible. But there is no room for error, my poor child! Your brother Henry and myself have, with our eyes, beheld the acts upon which the terrible report I have now made you is founded. We have discovered, beyond the possibility of any doubt, that the man we thought so high-minded, so pure in feeling and in taste, so honourable a gentleman, and, in one word, so every way excellent, as to deserve the happiness of being your husband, Kate—this man we have discovered to be a low gambler, a constant

associate of scoundrels and swindlers, and a constant frequenter of places haunted only by the very dregs of society. This we have ascertained by the evidence of our own eyes, my poor Kate! But again I say, and I call upon you, my child, to say it with me, thank God, that we did discover it before your fate was linked to his!"

Kate sat like one petrified, with her hand clasped in that of her uncle. She neither groaned, nor screamed, nor fainted, nor moved. She scarcely seemed to breathe for a minute or two; but at last she raised her eyes, and fixed them on the old man's working features, and then she said:

"Uncle, this cannot be. There has been some mistake, Uncle Walter. Where, how, and with whom, I know not; but there is some mistake in this. The thing is impossible, and therefore cannot be. The Frank Caldwell I have known cannot be the person you now describe: the two persons are different, and cannot be the same."

"Alas! alas! my poor love! my own, dear, pure-minded Kate! I wonder not at your incredulity!" returned the old man, with a

sigh. "It was not easy to make even me believe that it was possible; and yet I have lived long enough to learn that a mask may be worn, and that feelings may be feigned. But that the facts in this unhappy case are as I have stated them to be, is as certain as that you now hear me speak to you. Do you think, Kate, that I would have come upon this hateful errand, had the very slightest gleam of hope remained that Henry and myself could have been mistaken?"

"Nevertheless, Uncle Walter," returned Kate, very solemnly, "I do not believe it. Do not blame me for this apparent obstinacy. It is not the act of my will, it is truly and completely involuntarily. I have no power to believe it. Forgive me, dear, dear uncle, I *cannot!*"

"What can I say to you, my poor child?" exclaimed the greatly distressed old man. "Shall Henry come down to state to you what he has seen, and what he has heard? It is quite certain, Kate, that the testimony of one so little used to the world and the world's ways as I am, should not be too implicitly received. Listen to Henry, my dear love! He may be a more trustworthy evidence than I am. It is likely

enough, in such a case, that he might see more, and feel less. And yet I doubt if I am not doing him an injustice by saying so. For, on my life, Kate, he has felt this shock severely. Let me write to him, and tell him to join us here for a day or two."

"No, Uncle Walter. Nothing that Henry could tell me could possibly make any difference. Bear with me, dear uncle, and believe that I only speak the truth when I say that my mind has not the power of receiving the statement you have made, as true."

Walter got up from his chair, and for a minute or two paced up and down the room. His head was sunk upon his breast, and his hands clasped together behind his back.

"I love you for the earnestness of your faith, my sweet Kate," he said at last. "Fear not that I should blame you for it; for, if it were possible to believe with you, despite the irresistible evidence of my senses, I should do it. But, alas! my love, the long and sad experience, learned by the study of mankind, teaches us but too plainly that it is not safe to trust to such pure and beautiful enthusiasm. Or why should we see so many lamentable instances of mise-

rable marriages? Were the winning a love so nobly confiding as yours a certain test of worth in the winner, the rapid wearing out of love's illusions would not be so old and oft told a tale. Alas! my Kate, you seem to think that Love is lynx-eyed, whereas the sad experience of mankind has found him blind!"

Poor Kate drooped her lovely head upon her bosom, and remained silent, but the eloquent tears streamed fast from her eyes the while. At length she looked up to meet the sympathising, and not tearless, eyes of the old man, who was hanging over her.

"It must needs be, uncle," she said, "that you know much of which I am ignorant; and I must, and I ought to, listen to your opinion, as to the voice of wisdom, while I consider my own as nothing but ignorant and presumptuous folly. But I have always thought that, in all those unfortunate cases where worth is found mated with worthlessness, the love which led to the union was not built on the foundation that it ought to have been; but that it must have been the mere idle liking which may be caught by an agreeable exterior, and brilliant, though superficial talents. But, alas! alas!" cried the

poor girl, with a fresh burst of weeping, "if all I now hear be true, am I not at this very moment persisting in my unbelief from a hard and haughty confidence in my own judgment, and in my power of distinguishing genuine from fictitious excellence? And if it be so, may not the dreadful sorrow that has fallen upon me be sent to correct me?"

"Hush, hush, my Kate!" exclaimed the old man, earnestly; "fall not into the presumptuous folly which so many well-meaning persons mistake for piety, of fancying you can scan the intentions of Omniscience. Trust me, dear child, the system of those who think they can bring the government of the universe within the grasp of their dim comprehension, by construing all the miniature events of their daily life into a series of warnings, judgments, and vengeances, is a miserable lowering of our conceptions of the Deity to our own level, and not, as is pretended, a purifying elevation of them. Your duty in the present case, my dear love, appears to me to lie very plainly before you. It is absolutely necessary, that an end should be peremptorily and immediately put to this ill-starred intercourse between your family and this very worthless

young man. He must be written to, Kate, and it is you who, I believe, ought to do it."

"Oh, uncle! dearest Uncle Water!" sobbed poor Kate, almost convulsively, "do not let me write to him. I could not, oh! I could not do it. Dearest uncle, write *you* whatever ought to be written. It is only a few short hours since I wrote to him, and not more than half a one since I sent off this letter, in which I bid him hope, as I did, that the opposition to our union was not likely to last!"

"And why did you so write, dear Kate? What led you to entertain that hope?" said Walter, looking at her with some surprise.

"Perhaps," she replied, colouring, "it may not be very easy to make you exactly understand the reason. And yet I am quite sure I am right, Uncle Walter. When Lord Goldstable and you were here at tea, and Lord Goldstable was sitting next to me at the table, there was something in his manner that convinced me he had by some means or other been cured of all his ridiculous notions, poor boy, about marrying me. And still more than that, I think he intended to make me understand this. If I am right in thinking this, Uncle

Walter, I was justified in believing that papa and mamma would no longer have been so violently averse to—to what I know that you so cordially approved. Was I wrong, uncle, in writing so as to give him a share in the hope which had made me so very happy?"

"No, dearest, no!" replied Walter, with a heavy sigh.

"Then you will not ask me to follow that letter by another so very terrible? You will write yourself, Uncle Walter, will you not?"

"There is only one objection to my doing so," replied Walter, thoughtfully. "The authority of a dismissal, such as this, is often doubted, I believe, unless it comes from the lady herself."

"There will be no such difficulty in this case," returned Kate, with a slight tinge of bitterness in her accent, "if *you* tell Mr. Caldwell, uncle, that I do not wish to see him any more."

And here a fresh burst of tears interrupted her words, but she added immediately:

"If you write this, he will not believe that my wishes are other than you represent them to be. Nevertheless," she continued, grasping his

hand, and speaking with very solemn earnestness, "write to him the exact truth. Say that those—that *all* those—who have the best right to guide my judgment, think that I ought not to marry him; and that I, on my part, feel and know that it is my duty to yield myself to their guidance, and that it is my purpose so to do. But do *not* tell him that I believe him to be unworthy, for I do not. Forgive me for this, Uncle Walter. I will not deceive you as to the real state of my mind. I do not believe Frank Caldwell to be unworthy."

"I will not seek further to convince your unwilling judgment now, my dear child," replied Walter, gently. "In permitting me to write to him as I think I ought to write, you have granted all that I can reasonably require of you at this moment; and in writing this necessary but most painful letter, I will be careful to base your rejection of his addresses on the reasons you wish me to assign, and we cannot doubt that this will be sufficient."

Kate bent over the arm of the sofa on which she was sitting, and buried her flushed face and throbbing temples in her hands, while Walter, determined tht the whole of the painful duty

which he had undertaken should be got through at once, sat down before a writing-table, and produced the following letter.

"Sir,

"Had you been all which I once believed that I knew you to be, you would be better able to appreciate the pain with which I now address you, than I at present think it possible you can do. Miss Harrington's parents, as you know, have, from the first knowledge of your addresses to their daughter, expressed their disapprobation of them. While I, on the contrary, fancying that I discerned in you the qualities which I conceived calculated to ensure my niece's happiness, encouraged your hopes of obtaining her hand, trusting that, with time and a fuller knowledge of you, their opposition would be withdrawn. On me, therefore, devolves most fitly the very painful duty of announcing to you, that circumstances which have recently come to my knowledge, and to the knowledge of other members of Miss Harrington's family, respecting your manner of life, and ordinary pursuits, have rendered the family of Miss Harrington unanimous in their wishes on this

subject, and we are all equally desirous that no further intercourse should take place between that young lady and yourself. I have only to add, that it is her determination to be guided in this matter entirely by the judgment of her friends, and to yield herself without opposition to their decision.

"I am, &c., &c.,

"WALTER HARRINGTON."

The old man's hand was somewhat less steady than usual, perhaps, as he wrote this letter; but he immediately folded it up, for it was his first impulse to seal and dispatch it to the post, without torturing poor Kate with any farther discussion on the subject; but his next thought told him that it was due to her that she should be made aware of the compliance he had shown to her wishes, and that she should know that her request had been strictly complied with as to the reason assigned for her rejection. He therefore read the letter to her.

She meekly listened to it, meekly bowed her head when he had concluded, but made no reply or observation whatever.

"God bless and comfort thee, my poor

child!" said the old man, bending down and impressing a kiss upon her forehead. "It is a hard task for one who had built all his schemes of happiness on the notion of making one loved being happy, to take the labouring oar for the purpose of making him miserable. I will go now, my poor Kate! I do not want to encounter your aunt. Farewell, dearest! you shall see me again ere long."

And so saying, he put the fatal letter in his pocket, and left the Rectory with a step that seemed to have lost all its long-preserved elasticity.

Nevertheless, he felt more inclined for a solitary walk than for any other occupation during the hours that must pass before it would be dinner-time; and accordingly he took the road towards Doucham, intending to post the letter there, and so return to Brandon.

CHAPTER III.

We must now adjourn to one of those strongly-marked old world oases in the midst of modern London, called the "Inns of Court." It is strange how long and obstinately some localities will retain traces of the character originally stamped upon them, while others start forward and pride themselves in taking the van in everything tending to change and innovation. Nowhere, perhaps, in the whole of our vast metropolis is there to be found so strong a perfume of the past (to borrow a French phrase), as in our Inns of Court, and beyond all others, in the Temple.

It would be difficult, perhaps, to describe

with any very satisfactory degree of accuracy, in what this peculiarly characteristic savour consists. The present occupants of these courts and squares are undeniably modern nineteenth century men, engaged in pursuits intimately connected with the busy modern life going on outside their precincts; yet certain it is that scarcely the least reflective individual can pass the venerable gateway, which separates the tumult of Fleet Street from the quiet courts and gardens of the Temple, without feeeling as if they had suddenly stepped back into a former age.

To those a little more observant and imaginative, it really seems as if some living traces of the old knightly monks remained there still. None such can have walked up and down that noble terrace—that one green spot on the grimy bank of poor old dirty Father Thames, without being, in some little degree, conscious of an influence still spread around them by those mysterious mailed and cross-legged figures, lying in stony state beneath the venerable edifice, before which they have just passed.

It was on the third-floor of the tall pile of buildings, which forms the western boundary

of this garden terrace, that two young men sat *tête-à-tête* at breakfast on the morning at which our narrative has arrived. Their table was placed at an open window, for the day was a fine summer day, even in London, and this window commanded a view of the garden, the river and the dim smoky bank beyond it.

The inhabitant of many a low-roofed cottage in merry England, and of many a sunny garret in Paris, would have difficulty in believing that this small dingy room, reached by hard climbing up three flights of dark, steep, dirty stairs, with its window commanding in addition to the preciously quiet, but very dingy garden, a countless collection of mud-embedded colliers, was a possession so coveted, and so valuable, that its annual rent was double the entire income of many an independent well-to-do *rentier* who *flâné's* away his elegant leisure hours amid the gay alleys of the Tuileries.

It is really, however, a very sober truth, that the inhabitant of chambers overlooking the Temple garden, pays a sum for his dwelling, which lazier and poorer nations deem a comfortable competency for the support of a gentlemanlike sort of existence.

The fortunate master of the three small rooms, with coal and clerk holes complete, situated as we have described, was our unlucky friend, Frank Caldwell. And the gentleman breakfasting with him was his brother—his twin-brother; and in truth it would have been well-nigh impossible for the eye alone to have known them apart, or to have guessed which was the hard-working young barrister, and which "the man of pleasure about town."

It seems consistent with all we know of philosophy, and with all we can guess of the proximate causes of character, to suppose that two beings so alike in all of which the eye can take cognizance, should be equally alike, or very nearly so, in intellectual and moral qualities. And probably such was, in a great degree, originally the case between these two brothers. Although in saying this we reason greatly in the dark, for the causes of intellectual and moral varieties of character are much too subtle for us, as yet, to follow them with any very satisfactory degree of accuracy. But at the beginning of life, and before education, professional habits, and other accidents

moulded and shaped the education, it is highly probable that Richard Caldwell, and Frank, his brother, born half an hour after him, were greatly more alike in all respects than after they had both undergone the shaping process by which the accidents of life make us individually what we are at the end of it.

In the case of the brothers Richard and Francis Caldwell, many circumstances existed calculated to produce a greater difference between them than nature appeared originally to have intended; and among these the inheritance by the first-born of a considerable fortune from an uncle, was, perhaps, one of the most influential in making them both what they now were.

The spur to talent and to industry, which necessity had applied to the younger, had given activity to his faculties, if it had not created them; while the total absence of such a stimulant in the case of the elder, had naturally produced the contrary effect, and many good gifts bestowed upon him by nature, had been either suffered to rust in idleness, or to display themselves by an activity of ill, instead of well-doing.

Widely dissimilar as they were in character, however, they now sat brother-like together at their breakfast, while the following conversation passed between them.

"Well, Frank," said the more sprightly-mannered, but somewhat older-looking of the two brothers, "it is a very charming thing, I know, to fall in love, and doubtless more charming still to discover, that the loved one loves again. And more charming than either, must, I dare say, be the prospect of entering into the holy state of matrimony. But 'for a' that, and a' that,' and twice as much as a' that,' I could not, if I were in your place, purpose to leave the old rooms for ever without a disagreeable twinge at the heart."

"The years I have passed here have certainly been very peaceful and very happy years," replied the other, more gravely; "but nevertheless, Dick, to a reading and somewhat home-keeping man, the life in chambers is a lonely one."

"That is as one may choose to make it!" replied the other. "It is the true life of liberty. Who is it that says: 'That only free man, the

man of chambers ?' Whoever said it, he spoke truly, and perfect freedom is a glorious thing, put what you will in the balance against it."

"Yes. There certainly is a charm in perfect independence," replied Frank, "and I do not deny that I have felt a great charm in that perfect absence of all restraint, which enables a man to set off upon an excursion to the Himalaya mountains with no greater preparation than the turning a latch-key. But happy as my Temple life has been, I tell you, Dick, that the felicity to which I am now looking forward, is as much superior to all that I have enjoyed in these dim, snug, quiet, and comfortable rooms, as is the inspiring joy created by looking at the cupola of St. Peter's, bathed in the glowing light of Italy, to the gratification of gazing upon that black mass of St. Paul's there, seen through the smoke of London."

"Very eloquent, and very sublime! which is all very natural upon the preent occasion, because you are in love with the pretty thing that is enticing you away from your dear old chambers," replied his brother; "but if you are sentimental in one way, I may be sentimental in

another, and I declare to you, I do feel a great deal of tender regret at the idea that this snug retreat is closed against me for ever. I have passed many a p easant evening here, Frank!"

"And those evenings, which I am afraid have been the most respectable portion of your existence, have decidedly been the least respectable portion of mine. Therefore, it is but natural, you know, that I should regret the loss of them less than you do," replied Frank.

"Now come, my good fellow! Don't let us have any preaching now. I expect an awful amount of lecturing as soon as you shall be fairly seated in the magisterial chair of a father of a family. But you are not there yet, you know, so pray do not begin beforehand," returned the other.

"You know, very well, that I am not given to preaching, Dick; especially to you, who are my elder brother by several minutes," returned the junior. "But it is exactly because it *is* beforehand, as you say, that I want to talk to you about your way of life for the future. Little as we have lived together, Dick, these rooms

have always been, as you know, a sort of second home to you, and many an evening has been spent here in such moderate carousals as you could seduce me into, and which would otherwise, I am afraid, have been passed by you in much less harmless places. Should my hopes for my future destiny be realized, my dear Dick, you will no longer have this harbour of refuge; and unless you will break through your mischievous resolution of remaining a stranger to my sober friends, we must, for the future, see less of each other than ever, and this would be a cause of very sincere sorrow to me."

"Thirdly and lastly," interrupted Dick. "On with you, most solemn brother! Do get to the end of it as soon as you can; and draw it mild, will you?"

"Well, then, thirdly and lastly," returned Frank, "I want you to consent to my introducing you to a little respectable society. If you would only agree not to cut utterly and altogether, all the decent-living portion of the world, it would be gaining something—nay, I should think that it would be gaining a great deal, for in that case I should be sure of not being

altogether separated from you. If you would only occasionally consent to pass your evenings in good society, it would at least be some hours saved from the dangers of the gaming-table; nor do I at all despair, my dear Dick, but that after making the experiment, you may feel disposed to confess that, upon the whole, it is as pleasant to consort with decent, honest folks, who want nothing from you, as with scoundrels who are on the *qui vive* to rob you every time you come within their reach."

"Rob me! By Jove you are not far wrong. But your sage proposal, my dear brother, has in it a good deal of that species of wisdom which suggested the closing of the stable-door after the steed was stolen. I am very nearly safe from any farther robbery, brother Frank, I can tell you that," said the gambler, gloomily. "But never mind; you may think it is all for the best, for I am quite in the humour now to do whatever you like. And as I feel greatly inclined to believe that my own particular friends, the blacklegs, will have no more to say to me as soon as they find I have no more to lose, I shall, you see, be reduced to the neces-

sity of becoming respectable, *bon gré, mal gré.* There, Frank," he continued, drawing from his pocket some few pieces of silver money, and tossing them in his hand; "that is the amount of all my present possessions in current coin of the realm, so you perceive that your homily could not have been pronounced at a more auspicious moment. Now, then, for the adventures of Richard Caldwell, Esq., in pursuit of respectability. Where is your first cover, Frank, eh? Where are we to throw off to-night?"

"There's a good fellow!" returned his brother, greatly pleased by this ready compliance with a request which, heretofore, he had often made in vain. "You shall go with me to-night to—"

"Now don't come it too strong just at first, Frank!" returned the other. "If you plunge me neck and heels into pure virtue at once, I shall never be able to stand it. Don't you think it should be respectability with the chill off to begin with? A draught of propriety swallowed neat would be sure to take my breath away. If you could take me now, for example, to the chambers of some hard-drinking judge, or to the

soirée of some five-guinea-point dowager, it would be very judicious! The first steps to virtue made easy, you know. Let us begin gently!"

"I doubt if my visiting-list contains anything so convenient," replied his brother; "but I was going to propose taking you to-night to a house celebrated for the miscellaneous variety of its guests. I think you know the Miss Wigginsvilles?"

"Now, Frank, that's too bad!" cried the other. "By way of accustoming me gradually to the highly-rarified atmosphere of decorous drawing-rooms, you dash me at once into the midst of three old maids! You have no mercy! You catch a naked savage, and by way of gently coaxing him into civilization, you begin by cramming him into the boots and leathers of a life-guardsman! You should do things by degrees, I tell you. Fancy me tossed, battledore and shuttlecock fashion, from political economy to physical science, and from evangelical piety back again to political economy. Everybody playing the old schoolboy game of 'no child of mine' with me."

"Come, come! be reasonable, Dick," returned his brother, coaxingly. "I might turn

one of your own metaphors against you, and tell you that it is far easier to plunge into the water at once, than to stand dipping your toes and shivering on the edge of it. But metaphors apart, I really think you might pass an evening in the Wigginsville drawing-room pleasantly enough. You are sure to see a great variety of characters there; some among them decidedly worth contemplating. Besides, it is a house almost always open some part of the evening: and if you seriously intend to give up your pernicious old haunts, you might often find it an amusing lounge when you have nothing else to do with yourself."

"I can conceive nothing more seducingly delightful," replied the gay rake. "But don't you think, Frank," he added, "that such a society, indulged in habitually, might be too exciting for one unused to anything so brilliant? Might not my nervous system suffer, think you, from the too great tension produced by enjoying the society of three old maids at once?"

"The sharp arrows of your wit, my dear Dick, are sad random shots, and fly very wide of the mark, I do assure you. I believe I can obtain for you the *entrée* to the Wigginsville

house; but I by no means undertake to ensure you any portion of their individual attention, beyond that of a kind welcome. Their rooms are always full, and all and each of the sisters are sure to be too much occupied with their own particular set to have any troublesome attention to bestow upon a new-comer like you."

"Well, Frank, you shall have it all your own way this time. I am yours for to-night, to be disposed of altogether according to your sovereign will and pleasure. And our rallying cry is to be 'Wigginsville and Virtue!'" was the good-humoured reply; and then the strongly-contrasted, yet strongly-attached twin-brothers nodded a mutual adieu; the elder wandering away, probably without any fixed purpose at all, and the younger placing himself at a table covered with papers and books, and assiduously setting himself to the perusal of a brief.

CHAPTER IV.

THAT evening was a great evening at the Casa Wigginsville, as Frank Caldwell was wont to call the hospitable mansion of the sisters. It was known to be the last of the Wigginsville *réunions* for the season, and each of the three sisters had done her utmost to muster her special following in full force; the general gathering was accordingly as heterogeneous and brilliant as the contents of the kaleidoscope, although the scientific management of the prismatic arrangement was perhaps wanting; for it occasionally happened, that although the materials were brilliant, their symmetry of position was a good deal left to chance, and, was

therefore, occasionally rather grotesque than graceful.

On the present occasion, Miss Hannah's forces mustered particularly strong, as was often the case at that season of the year. The flock of the gentle Mary Jane was ever most numerous in that once merry month of May, to which Exeter Hall has done so much to impart a sombre hue. Her gathering, however, was a very respectable one also, and she smiled upon them all, with a serenity that was quite seraphic.

Nor had the scientific Miss Jemima any cause to be dissatisfied, for F.R.S.'s and F.L.S.'s, and the F's of all other S's, are always in season when partridges and grouse are not.

The rooms were already crowded when Frank Caldwell and his brother arrived: and before they had succeeded in winning their way to the place in which the elder sister was stationed, the laughter-loving Dick was well disposed to confess that Frank was quite right in declaring that much amusement might be found there.

The crowd, in fact, was thickly studded with notabilities, and whenever this is the case, an

intelligent looker-on is sure to find amusement of one sort or other. One of the first figures which caught the attention of Dick Caldwell was that of Mr. Muggridge, the great statistian, whose mania is to reduce everything to tables; and there was no mistaking the vocation to which he had devoted himself for a moment, after getting within hearing of his voice.

A little further on they came upon Sir Benjamin Scales, whose whole time, intellect and energy are devoted to increasing the activity and productiveness of our fisheries. According to him, all the social misery arising from short commons would vanish at once and for ever if mankind would only be persuaded to catch more cod-fish and herrings.

Immediately behind him stood Triptolimus Delve, Esq., the philanthropic patron of spade husbandry; and before you had listened to him for two minutes, you would be sure to hear that "burn the plough" must take place of the old agricultural toast before England can hope to see any more merry days.

Various other incarnations of the various abstract ideas which are moving the surface

of our social philosophy were to be found right and left as they moved onward through the crowd. Amongst these was the active Mr. Suttaby, whose ceaseless cry is, "Consume your coal smoke!" and the energetic Mr. Balquerma, whose equally constant refrain is, "Consume your dead bodies!"

At no great distance stood the reverend and amiable Mr. Secker, whose whole life may be described as a contest with Juggernath and his car. Standing with his back to this excellent and and pains-taking individual, was the equally reverend and amiable Mr. Hoaxum, who cares for nothing but circulating the Scriptures among the inmates of the Sultan's seraglio; while, a little further on, stood the gentle Mr. Milduc, whose days are devoted solely to the task of converting to the doctrines of the Reformed Church, the little Italian boys who come to this country to grind hurdy-gurdies and sell images.

Then they came upon Mr. Pinion, who was discoursing eloquently on the certain application to ordinary travelling (and at no very distant date) of the flying machine, of which he had the honour to be the inventor; while

near him stood, studying the effects of light and shadow upon the different groups around him, Mr. Closate, the patentee of a new daguerreotype process.

It is quite true that all these, with many others, might be very fairly classed as monomaniacs, yet most of them were very useful men in their generation; for much of the rapid progress which the world is now making may be traced to the strenuous exertions of some enthusiastic labourer, whose devoted fanaticism confines his efforts to one point.

The age of treatises on universal knowledge is past. We have no admirable Crichtons now, who know everything; but we have specialities who, each in their own way, do more work in the "go-ahead" line in one day, than crowns the live-long labours of many an universal genius. This is the happy result of the division of labour carried into the sphere of intellectual exertion.

The Wigginsville rooms were now full to overflowing, and the roar of talk produced by this high-tide of human tongues was incessant. But in the midst of this most desirable and

flourishing condition of drawing-room affairs, Miss Jemima happened to perceive that our neophyte friend, Dick Caldwell, was standing silent. Now, Miss Jemima had an especial dislike to seeing any of her guests unengaged or unamused, and she instantly accosted him, saying rather abruptly: "My dear Mr. Caldwell!—oh, you are so like your brother!—do let me introduce you to my friend, Mr. Battiscomb, who has invented a sounding-board for pulpits! I know you would be delighted if he would have the kindness to explain it to you. It will, beyond all doubt, turn out to be the most important improvement in church architecture that has been made for many years. Mr. Battiscomb—Mr. Caldwell. Mr. Caldwell—Mr. Battiscomb. Mr. Caldwell is excessively anxious to hear all about your new sounding-board, Mr. Battiscom; will you have the kindness to explain it to him?"

So Dick was handed over to listen to a lecture on acoustics, while Miss Jemima tripped on, perfectly satisfied by having so well performed her duty in one place, and anxious to be equally successful elsewhere.

But ere she had made many steps in advance, her scientific propensities caused her to stop suddenly, and stand profoundly still; for it was impossible that she could abstain from listening to a celebrated surgeon, who was detailing in a very animated manner some of his recent experiments with chloroform. Neither could she altogether refuse at the same time to give a little attention to a most interesting account of some recent mesmeric experiences, which a well-known enthusiast in that line was relating, rather *sotto voce*, to two or three ladies who were eagerly listening to him. From the mingled statements of these two gentlemen, the delighted Miss Jemima carried away the conviction, that a patient under the influence of chloroform had conversed fluently in French, though previously quite ignorant of the language.

After about an hour of these varieties, which the new-comer really enjoyed much more than he expected to do, the two brothers met in the third drawing-room.

"I say, Frank," whispered the other, "I thought that you were to bring me among people warranted to rob me of nothing—by way of contrast, you know, to my worthy friends in

Aylesbury Street—but before I had been here an hour, by Jove, a fellow had done me out of my own body!"

"What do you mean, Dick? What jest have you got hold of now?" said his brother.

"It's no joke at all," replied Dick. "I tell you that it is all up with me, as far as Christian burial is concerned; for there's a fellow in the next room who has coaxed me to give him a *post-obit* on my own carcass, that he may burn it down into ivory-black, I believe, or something of that sort."

"Oh, I see! You have fallen into the hands of Mr. Balquerma. I'll engage for it that he told you *cremation* was the only mode by which a civilized people ought to dispose of their dead. Have you really enrolled yourself under his banner?" said Frank.

"I believe so," he replied. "The fellow set at me with his deadly-lively talk about grave-yards containing countless millions of dead bodies; the disagreeable effects of which he dwelt upon so eloquently, that I really felt quite ashamed at the idea of adding to the nuisance;

so I told him at last that he should be welcome to my body as soon as I had done with it; and he appeared perfectly delighted by my generosity. But it is about time to go, isn't it Frank?"

But before this question could be answered, a small man approached the brothers, and laying a finger on the sleeve of the younger, said:

"Mr. Frank Caldwell! I beg pardon for interrupting you, Sir, but may I ask your attention for two minutes? It is a little matter of business, not quite in my usual line, but tolerably important nevertheless. May I say a word to you?"

"Certainly, Mr. Garbel," replied Frank, turning towards him. "What is it?"

And then having looked at him for a moment, he added:

"I think I can guess. It is something about the marriage-settlements. Am I right?"

"No, Mr. Caldwell; that's not at all settled as yet. But, nevertheless, we are to be married the day after to-morrow, Mr. Caldwell; and Mary Jane begged me to say that it would give her great pleasure if you would join our

little party at breakfast on the happy morning, Mr. Caldwell."

"I shall be most happy to do so, my dear Sir," replied Frank, with a friendly smile; "and I wish you joy with all my heart. The day after to-morrow, is it?" What is your hour?

"Breakfast, eleven o'clock; ten o'clock to go to church; twelve o'clock, off we go, carriage and four, and no mistake!"

"Well, Mr. Garbel, as I said before, I heartily wish you joy. I think you will have a very good wife, and I hope you will be a very happy man."

"Not a shadow of doubt of it, Mr. Caldwell, I certainly shall be a very happy man, and a very fortunate man, Sir. 'A virtuous wife is a crown to her husband!' That's in Solomon's reports, you know, Sir. And *I* assure *you* Sir," said the little man, lowering his voice to a confidential tone, "*I* assure *you*, that Miss Mary Jane is out-and-out the most virtuous young woman that ever *I* knew. Why, bless you, Sir, she would not fix the day without consulting the Lord. However, *I* consulted Miss Hannah, and we soon settled it!"

"And what did Miss Hannah say to the match?" asked Frank, not a little amused by the out-pourings of the young attorney's happiness.

"Why, you know, Mr. Caldwell," replied Garbel, "that Miss Hannah has not the affable ways and pleasant lady-like manners that Miss Mary Jane—Mrs. Garbel that is to be—is so greatly admired for; and we must allow for that, you know. Between ourselves, and as speaking to a friend of the family, I don't mind telling you that Miss Hannah did not take altogether kindly to it at first: Though she is only an elder sister, everybody may see that she is as much the mistress of the family as if she were the mother; and that is where the shoe pinches. Her very first words about it were certainly anything but civil.

"'Mary Jane's a fool,' she said, 'and you would never think of her if it were not for the sake of buttering your bread.'

"Very rude that, wasn't it, Mr. Caldwell? However, I told her I was above any such low considerations; but at the same time I told her that I considered it as my duty, to look to

the means of maintaining a family before I put myself in the way of having one. And then she answered very short:

"'I'll tell you how matters stand, Mr. Garbel,' said she, 'and then you may do as you like. My half-sister, Miss Mary Jane, is not worth one shilling in the world, beyond a few hundred pounds. All my father's property, worth mentioning, was settled on the children by his first wife, of whom I am the only survivor; and my two half-sisters,' says she, 'are altogether dependant upon me.'

"Anybody might have seen, Mr. Caldwell, how truly I was in love with Mary Jane by the way took this. I declare I was all over in a cold sweat. And then, after a minute, Miss Hannah went on again, by saying:

"'And now, Mr. Garbel, you had best listen to what I am going to say next. My half-sister, Miss Mary Jane, is a very good sort of body in her way, but she is a fool. I have always foreseen that some day or other she would be wanting to marry somebody, and I have made up my mind,' says she, 'upon what I intend to do. I don't mean to say but what

she might have done worse,' said Miss Hannah, very civilly.

"And then, of course, I said that I was very much flattered by her good opinion. And then she said:

"'Well, now, Mr. Garbel, I don't intend to let my father's daughter starve, while I have a comfortable fortune of my father's earning; and if you choose to marry her, now that you know she has got nothing, and if you make her a good husband, it may be, perhaps, as wise a thing as you can do. I don't say so for certain, observe. I give you no encouragement, no promise. You must know your own affairs best. I only say what *may* be. But don't fancy that you are going to get possession of Miss Mary Jane's fortune, for she has got none.'

"Well, Sir," continued the little attorney, still in a low whisper, and still keeping possession of Frank by keeping his finger on his sleeve—"well, Sir, I tried hard to get her to say what her intentions really were; but devil a bit."

"'If you marry my sister, and make her a

good husband, I don't think you'll want for bread, or for a little butter either, perhaps.'

"But not one inch beyond that would she go, and I don't think Sir Badgerly Browbeat himself could have got a word more out of her."

"I should think you might very safely trust to Miss Hannah's kindness," replied Caldwell.

"Well, I suppose so," replied the somewhat disappointed, but not despairing, lover. "I have talked the matter over with Mary Jane, and she says she is sure her sister means to do something handsome. She says that Miss Hannah always is very generous, but very fond, too, of being mistress. So, in short, Mr. Caldwell, we have decided upon making a match of it. My own sentiments, I'm sure, are very honourable, and I am willing to flatter myself that Miss Hannah, on her side, means to come forward as she ought to do. But what I was coming to, Mr. Caldwell, is just to ask, as Miss Hannah has so very high an opinion of you, whether you would have the great kindness to speak to her on the subject. You see it would be a great satisfaction to me if I knew some-

thing for certain. Would you just speak to her about it, Sir?"

"Impossible, Mr. Garbel," replied Frank. "I have no such intimacy with the family as could justify my doing so."

"Very well, Sir," said the little man, backing at once; "just as you please about that. But I hope you will have no objection to tell Miss Hannah that you have promised to come to the breakfast?"

"Certainly not, Mr. Garbel. There is Miss Hannah. I will go to her immediately and tell her of your obliging invitation.

The full-dressed, and very magnificent-looking spinster was seated at a table at no great distance, in her favourite attitude, with one knee crossed over the other, and armed with a huge ivory paper-knife, with which she was triumphantly pointing out to Sir Benjamin Scales a passage in a newly arrived review.

"Just read these two or three pages, Sir Benjamin, that's all," said she, with a tremendous wave of her cimeter-like paper-knife. "You will find my old argument admirably well put. Depend upon it, my good Sir, you cannot substitute herring and cod for beef

and mutton without lowering the type of the race so fed."

Sir Benjamin obediently took the volume in hand to do as he was bid; and Frank took possession of a vacant chair close to the old lady. Her attitude, and her dress too, was magisterial; she really looked glorious in a mighty turban of crimson and gold, with a pair of heavy spectacles across her high nose, and a flowing robe of richly embroidered silk to match the turban.

"So the wedding is to be on Thursday, I hear?" said Frank, "and I have an invitation to the breakfast, though it did not come from you, Miss Wigginsville."

"No, indeed," she replied, "I have invited nobody. I have meddled very little in the matter, Mr. Caldwell. Fools will act according to their folly. There's no help for it. So I make up my mind to it as a *fait accompli*."

"Then I can hardly hope that I may congratulate you upon the event?" said Frank.

"Well! I don't know why it should not be as much a matter of congratulation as many an event of the same nature which people agree to

consider so," said she. "I told Mr. Garbel that I thought Mary Jane might do worse, and he seemed greatly flattered by my saying so—which certainly told well for his humility. And if he makes the poor little silly body a good husband, which I don't think at all improbable under the circumstances, it will be a very good match for him, and it will do well for her. For Mary Jane, you see, though a very good sort of little woman in her way, has not the gifts of mind and character which might justify her in determining to be an old maid."

"It is certainly a condition of life, my dear Miss Wigginsville, which offers many opportunities, not always taken advantage of, for the manifestation of superior qualities," replied Frank; "but it would be unreasonable to look for these qualities in all. At what hour on Thursday shall I be with you? At ten for the ceremony? or at eleven for the breakfast?"

"I advise the latter, Mr. Caldwell," replied Miss Hannah. "There is no great satisfaction, according to my notions," she continued, "in seeing a couple of people solemnly pledging

themselves to do that which they themselves, and everybody else, know perfectly well it is wholly out of their power to promise honestly, because it is wholly out of their power to tell whether they will have the power of doing it or not. And this statement, you know, is descriptive of the best cases, for, in very many, both parties are vowing what they know to be false. I really do think, Mr. Frank Caldwell, that some alteration ought to be made in the wording of that ceremony. It is quite shocking to think how many people feel themselves legally constrained, as it were, to march boldly up to the altar for the express purpose of formally pledging themselves to a lie."

"Come, come, Miss Hannah," replied the happy and hopeful young man, laughing, "you are too hard upon love and its believing votaries. If you are so very fiercely indignant against all the lads and lasses, I must run! Good-night. *Au revoir.* On Thursday."

As to the rest of the heterogeneous assemblage, those who had talked more than they had been called upon to listen, went to their homes, declaring that the party had been a

most delightful one, and that they did not know how the Miss Wigginsvilles contrived to make their receptions so particularly pleasant; while those who had been obliged to listen, more than they talked, retired yawning to their beds, and wondered how people could contrive to be so very stupid.

CHAPTER V.

On the morning following the party at Casa Wigginsville, Frank Caldwell and his brother were again seated at the same window, enjoying the same dingy landscape, and discussing the party of the previous evening, over their breakfast.

"It was not so very bad now, after all—was it Dick? Confess the truth honestly. Have you not passed duller evenings, in more dangerous places, than you passed last night at the spinsters' menagerie?" said Frank.

"Yes, upon my soul, have I," replied his brother, very cordially. "I was exceedingly well amused. They ought to keep some of

their animals muzzled though! But, upon the whole, and all joking apart, it really was a very pleasant evening. But one would not like to *live* in the zoological gardens, you know!"

"That is the affair of the ladies themselves," replied Frank.

"Clearly so; and they have evidently selected their vocation as a matter of choice," returned his brother. "But I should think the trade of a paviour a perfect sinecure in comparison! As it is, and despite the good-will which they evidently, one and all, bring to the business, I think that pale one, that you call Miss Jemima, is sinking under it. It was evident to me that the attacks of that man with the flying machine shook her poor nerves very considerably. I suspect that her brain reels, as it were, under the vibration occasioned by the inevitable concussion of the various ologies she receives into it. I should think that another very clever invention would finish her. It is the last ounce that breaks the horse's back, you know."

"Poor dear Miss Jemima!" returned Frank, with a pitying smile. "She certainly does look

a little overpowered sometimes. But you can have no anxiety of the same kind on the part of Miss Hannah. She has, I promise you, stability of brain enough to stand the wear and tear of all the conflicting theories, mechanical or metaphysical, that may be let loose upon her."

"You mean the old lady with the hook nose, gold spectacles, and grand turban, I presume?" said the other. "Yes," he added, after meditating for a moment, "I am inclined to think that nose, turban, and spectacles, would stem anything; like the figure-head of some gallant ship! But I was afraid of her, and cautiously steered out of her way. She is a terrible old lady, I suspect!"

"No; she is not a terrible old lady at all!" replied Frank, in a tone of very cordial liking. "Despite the nose, spectacles, turban, and other kindred infirmities of humanity, Miss Hannah is a very fine sort of creature. She has a hard head and a soft heart; and her eccentricities have all a smattering of fun, I might almost say of wit, in them, which creates a much stronger inclination to laugh with her, than at her."

"At any rate, it would take some time to get used to her," returned Dick. "And then there is the little one—the dainty, gentle, flaxen, middle-aged little one! What have you got to tell me about her?"

"Why, that you must take care not to fall in love with her, young man! I have not told you that I have been invited to a wedding on Thursday next. The bride being no other than this same flaxen little one," said Frank.

At this moment the sharp, peculiar, and unmistakeable rat-tat of a London postman was heard at the outer door of the chambers, and in the next moment the youth, who officiated as Frank's clerk, and who, as a matter of course, performed all the various functions incidental to the clerkship of juvenile barristers, entered the room, and approaching the cheerful breakfast-table, met the extended hand of his smiling master with that dread epistle, at the writing of which by Walter Harrington, at Stanton Rectory, we were present. Frank knew the firm bold hand-writing of the old man right well, and tore open the letter with eager impatience.

The letter which he had received the day

before from Kate, had inspired in him the same sanguine hope which had inspired the writer; and he felt now with an equally sanguine conviction, that seemed almost to approach to certainty, that this letter from Walter would confirm all his hopes and banish all his fears.

For he knew that the old man was most warmly his friend. He knew also the influential position he held in the Harrington family; and this, with the assurance of Kate, that Lord Goldstable had withdrawn from the field, was sufficient to persuade Caldwell that his venerable friend's despatch could bode him nothing but good.

Dreadful indeed was the transition from this state of mind to that which followed upon the perusal of Walter's terrible letter. Had such a letter reached him from any other man, it is probable that the consciousness of his own worth would not only have sustained his spirits, but have suggested, also, the probability of some mistake. But greatly as Frank Caldwell admired and venerated the old philosopher, he was quite aware that some of his opinions not only ran counter to the ordinary opinions of mankind,

but that, in some cases, they produced a feeling of hostility to usages, not only authorized, but entirely approved of by society.

Yet even with this broad field for conjecture as to the possible ground of the censure expressed in this mysterious letter, the unfortunate young man was totally at a loss to guess what it was he could have done to produce so sudden a change in the old man's judgment of him. In all honesty of heart, he felt it was impossible for him to accuse himself of anything to justify, or even to explain the manner in which Mr. Harrington now addressed him; yet he could not in this case, as he might in any other, have turned upon his accuser and defied him to prove that he was not worthy of Miss Harrington for with all the diffidence of real love, he felt it impossible that he could be worthy of her.

In reply to his brother's naturally anxious and naturally eager demand of "What on earth is the matter with you, Frank?" he put the letter into his hands.

"My dear fellow," he exclaimed, after reading it, and with a voice and manner that testified as much sympathy as it was possible he could feel for a disappointment in love, "my

dear fellow! for God's sake exert yourself, and snap your fingers at them all. The case, Frank, is as clear as daylight. Probably some pique of some sort caused the old fellow, in the first instance, to oppose the rest of the family, and to support you in opposition to this lordly Crœsus. But it is clear that they have now managed, somehow or other, to change his mind. She told you in her letter, you know, that her uncle was staying in the house of your rival as his guest; and though she might not have found it out at that time, you may rely upon it, that the old fellow would not have been there, if he had not changed his mind about his offer. Now can you believe, Frank, that any man in the wide world, whether old or young, can find himself in close intimacy with a lordling possessed of eighty thousand a-year, without feeling a little more tenderly disposed towards him by way of a nephew, than he possibly could towards another young fellow with about eight hundred? The whole thing is as plain as a pike-staff! He says that you are not what he thought you. No doubt, Frank, that may be very true, for anything we know to the contrary. He may have thought, and if the old gentle-

man says so, I dare say he did think, that you were possessed of a very comfortable competency. But depend upon it, his notions on that subject have undergone a very material change by the near contemplation of eighty thousand a-year."

"I tell you, Dick," replied his brother, sadly, shaking his head, "that if you had the very slightest acquaintance with that sublime old man, you would know that all you are saying is utter nonsense. Walter Harrington is not at all more likely to approve Lord Goldstable as the husband of his niece because he has rejected me; and I am quite sure, moreover, that he would never have become the young man's guest if he had not been well convinced that every thought of such a marriage had been given up. You will never see Miss Harrington the wife of Lord Goldstable. She may be induced to give *me* up, and I am sure she would do so without resistance, the moment she was made to believe that I was unworthy. Nay, this cruel letter seems to say that she has not waited for that, but that she has consented to obey the wishes of her family—of *all* her family, by which Walter Harrington evidently means to

include himself. But nevertheless, Dick, Miss Harrington will not marry Lord Goldstable. That is not it; I am not sacrificed to any rival. It is not that I fear; but what I do fear is, that Mr. Harrington has, by some means or other, been induced to think less highly of me than he did."

"Less highly than he did!" exclaimed his brother indignantly. "Less highly than he did! And is that any reason, or any excuse, for writing to a man as he has now written to you? Less highly, indeed! Nothing but thinking devilishly lowly of a fellow could justify such a tone as this insolent old man adopts."

"That is true," returned the miserable young man, suddenly changing colour, and evidently awakened to a keener perception of the severity of his old friend's language than he had been at first. "You are right, Dick—too, too right!" he added with a groan. "But what can he have heard of me? I am not conscious of being at enmity with any human being. Who is there who could have maligned me to him? Is it possible that I have an enemy?"

"Of course you have, my dear fellow; plenty and plenty. Who has not?" returned his brother, promptly. "But the more pressing question is, what do you mean to do? What will be your next step?"

"The worst of the misery is, that I can give no answer to that question," he replied. "I cannot at this moment perceive any possible line of conduct for me to pursue, to which there would not be heavy objections: and this uncertainty as to what my conduct ought to be is dreadful!"

"I should have no doubt about the matter if it were my own case," returned Dick, starting up, and pacing the room with rather a menacing aspect. "If the case were mine, I would not lose an hour before I made an attempt to see the girl herself. And there would be nothing so very difficult in the enterprise."

"If I had less perfect faith in the truth and honour of old Walter Harrington, I should do so," replied Frank; "and the proposal is a very tempting one." And then he, too, began pacing up and down the room; and for a

minute or too seemed deeply absorbed in meditation. "But, no!" he said at length, suddenly standing still, and facing his brother; "I will not do it! I will not put her to the agony of repeating to me, face to face, the rejection which she has commissioned her uncle to pronounce for her. You do not know this noble old man as I do, Dick, or you would understand the perfect, though most miserable certainty which I feel in his statement, that Miss Harrington acquiesces in the rejection which he has transmitted to me. If this were not the fact, Walter Harrington would not have stated it to be so. He states unequivocally that it is her determination to be guided in this matter by her family; and as he has stated this simply and exactly, be very sure that it is simply and exactly true."

"But are a young lady's purposes immutable, my good fellow?" returned Dick. "Lord bless me, Frank! you talk as if a girl's promise to her pa and ma, to be good, and mind what they say to her, were as immutable as the laws of the Medes and Persians! See her, my dear fellow—see her; and take my word for it, if you are right in believing she ever cared

for you at all, you will find no great difficulty in making her change her purposes. Can't you see something like hope in the scheme I propose?"

There was a tone of kindly interest in the manner in which this was said by the usually careless and thoughtless elder brother, that touched the younger one sensibly. He wrung his hand affectionately, and said: "If I don't follow your advice, Dick, it will not be because I doubt the affection which prompts it. But if you knew this old man, or his niece either, as I know them, you would understand better than I can now make you, why it is that I do not follow counsel which seems so reasonable."

"Well, then, I can only wish that I did know, them," replied the other; "as I might then have a better chance of saying something that should be really reasonable, instead of only seeming so."

"That is true—perfectly true. And your saying it, has suggested a new idea to me. There is at least one person who knows them, and knows them well, and who is, moreover, a truly kind friend of mine. I really must tell Miss Mary Jane that I cannot be at her

wedding-breakfast; and when I do this, I will contrive, if possible, to get a *tête-à-tête* with my friend Miss Hannah, and confide the whole matter to her. *She* can have heard no harm of me, as yet, that is quite certain, for she never received me more cordially than she did last night. She knows perfectly well the terms which I have been on with Walter Harrington. I will show her this letter, and hear her opinion of it;" and so saying, Frank seized upon his hat and prepared to leave the room, adding as he did so: "Well, Dick, I will leave you here; there are plenty of books lying about, but I don't think you will read very steadily. I am sure you feel for me."

"Upon my soul I do, with all my heart!" was the reply, and uttered in an accent that conveyed more than the words. "And I'll tell you what, Frank, while you go to your Miss Hannah, I'll go—let me see—no, I've nothing particular to suggest; only, Frank, as you walk along just think over the large chapter of accidents, chances, mistakes, blunders, and all the rest of it, that may have led your peerless old gentleman, with all his goodness, and all his wisdom, to get the wrong side of the post; and

if that's all, you know, he'll be sure, with all his goodness and wisdom, to get right again, and then everything may go well at last."

Frank nodded, and smiled as gaily as he could, and so the brothers parted; Frank taking his melancholy meditative way to his friend Miss Hannah, and Dick setting off in a contrary direction, deeply intent upon a scheme he had conceived for, at least, getting at the truth concerning old Walter Harrington's mysterious change towards his brother.

CHAPTER VI.

Dick Caldwell's project was a very simple one, yet nevertheless it was one, the execution of which presented some difficulties which he did not very well know how to get over.

"Since Frank, from some fine feeling or other, won't make any effort to find out where the loose screw is, I must do it for him," thought he. "I'll go"—it was thus his meditations proceeded—"I'll go and ask the old boy himself what crotchet he has got in his head? It can do no harm, and may do some good. He can't eat me, though I am such a graceless scamp. I know that it is a delicate sort of a thing having to do with a virtuous old gentle-

man of four-score, with lots of silver hair always ready to be brought down with sorrow to the grave, if any young scapegrace takes a disrespectful sort of liberty with him. I know they are ticklish customers to deal with; and all the world come out so strong in the expression of their virtuous indignation against anybody and everybody who is rude to them. But I can sport virtuous indignation too, on poor Frank's behalf, for I don't believe that he ever did anything wrong in his life; nay, for that matter, I am perfectly sure he never did. Confound the old fellow! what business has he to turn round upon him in this bullying style, and tell him that he is not the man he thought him? I can't call out an old boy of eighty, that's quite certain; but I can tell him he ought to be ashamed of himself, and bid him beware, old sinner, of evil-speaking, lying, and slandering; and that's what I will do. I'll be off at once! Frank must know nothing about it, or he'll be sure to stop me."

Such were the meditations of the reckless, but kind-hearted, twin-brother of the unfortunate Caldwell, when left in solitary possession of his chambers. But when he had arrived at this

conclusive and very satisfactory determination, he suddenly recollected the extremely unsatisfactory condition of his purse.

"Confound it!" he muttered, bitterly. "It is easy to say, I'll be off at once, but how the devil am to get off without cash?" And then he pulled forth the identical silver coins, which he had recently exhibited to his brother as the sum total of his ready money possessions. "How far will this carry me?" he murmured, very dejectedly. "The old fellow is a hundred miles off, or thereabouts. A five-pound note is the very least that would do for me. But where to put my hand upon a five-pound note between this and to-morrow morning, who shall tell me? A little bit of luck, now, and I might easily turn these shillings into pounds. I can but try, and try I will," said he, as he put on his hat. "I must get to the little go in thingamy street, I shall be sure to find that open; they're always at it, and there I'll try to make my crown a pound. Now we shall see if fortune has any respect for virtue. I am going to the silver hell with the very purest of motives. And certainly there is something

very delightful in the consciousness of virtue !"

And thus cogitating, Dick Caldwell left his brother's chambers with an eager step, telling the young clerk that his master was not to expect him till he saw him. An arrangement which was unfortunately too common with him to require any particular explanation.

Frank, meanwhile, wandered disconsolately onwards, alternately proposing and rejecting a dozen different solutions of the mystery which so painfully hung upon the conduct of his equally loved and honoured old friend; but he had arrived at the door of the Casa Wigginsville, without having hit upon one that appeared to have the slightest mixture of probability in it. To few others, even of the intimates of the family would the doors have been opened on that morning, for all the three sisters were in some way or other very busily occupied by preparing for the important event which was to take place on the morrow.

The gentle Mary Jane herself was earnestly occupied in the back drawing-room, penning about a score of hot-pressed, and touchingly

affectionate little farewell notes to the best-beloved of the fair company of spinsters she was about to quit. They differed very slightly from each other; they were all crossed of course, but being written in that peculiarly running hand, which carries the pen with the least delay over the largest space, the time allotted to each was not very long. Most of them were illustrated by a tear-drop, which by a happy chance always fell on the passages to which such a commentary was most appropriate, so that notwithstanding the haste in which they were necessarily written, they were all, as the heart of Mary Jane told her, exactly what they ought to be!

Miss Jemima had the entire possession of the front drawing-room where she was arranging an immense amount of white satin ribbon into little bows, and tying together a countless quantity of name cards in hymeneal bonds of silver cord. Miss Hannah herself was in the dining-room, engaged in the graver cases incident to preparing for the splendid breakfast of the morrow.

But in spite of all this, the servant who opened the door to Frank Caldwell, though he hesitated

for half a moment, did not deem it his duty absolutely to refuse him admittance; but upon being desired to tell Miss Hannah that Mr. Frank Caldwell particularly desired to speak a few words to her, he undertook to deliver the message, civilly apologizing for leaving him to wait in the passage while he delivered it. And this judicious Cerberus received immediate proof that the bold measure of announcing a visitor on such a day was not an unpardonable offence, for it was in an accent of very cordial welcome that the busy lady replied:

"Tell Mr. Frank Caldwell that I shall be very glad to see him if he will have the kindness to come to me here."

Many, nay, most ladies would certainly have been discomposed, if not absolutely offended, by being interrupted at so very busy a moment; but Miss Hannah was not one of them. Knowing, however, how her sisters were respectively engaged in the drawing-rooms, and that they would have been by no means pleased to see a visitor, particularly of the male sex, walk in to interrupt their labours, she never dreamed of ordering Frank to enter any presence but her

own; but as far as she herself was concerned, she was glad to see him now, as she always was; for he was an especial favourite, and valued at his worth by the critical and discerning old lady.

With her own hands she placed two chairs at a convenient distance from the prodigious table, and seating herself in one, with the air of a person by no means unwilling to take a little rest, she motioned to him to take the other, not, however, till she had first cordially shaken hands with him.

"Can you pardon me, my dear Miss Hannah," said he, "for breaking in upon you at a time when it was so more than likely that I should find you very busy? But I really had great need of seeing you for a few moments; for the fact is, I want your advice, my good friend."

"I am never too busy to see friends whom I value as sincerely as I value you, Mr. Frank Caldwell," she replied. "But I don't quite like your looks, Mr. Frank," resumed the old lady, looking at him with friendly interest. "In the first place, I don't think you are well, for you look

paler than usual; and in the next place, you look anxious and uneasy. You have had no painful news, I hope, of any kind?"

"I have received the very worst news, my dear Miss Hannah, that it was possible I could receive," replied the unhappy young man, with a forced composure of manner, which plainly enough betrayed much inward suffering. "It is quite impossible, Miss Hannah, that I should come to you to-morrow morning, and I preferred coming to tell you this myself to the sending a mere formal note of excuse."

"My dear Mr. Caldwell, you frighten me!" returned the old lady, looking at him with affectionate concern. "For goodness sake, tell me what has happened! I do indeed see that you are suffering. Something painful, I am sure has happened to you! I would to God that I had the power of doing you any good. But, at any rate, my dear Mr. Frank, let me know what *has* happened to you."

"I am quite sure that you would help me had you the power to do so," he replied; "but I fear, I fear that you have no such power. I have this morning received a letter from Mr.

Walter Harrington, who was at Stanton when he wrote it, telling me, with much apparent sorrow, but very decidedly, that I must no longer think of his niece."

"Good Heaven, Mr. Caldwell! Not think of her? Not think of dear, beautiful Kate? From Mr. Harrington?—Mr. Walter?—Impossible! It cannot be, Sir. I am quite sure that there is some mistake among you. I certainly cannot call Mr. Walter Harrington an *old* acquaintance, for, as you well know, he has not been amongst us very long; but, nevertheless, I feel as if I knew him thoroughly, and it would be a difficult thing to make me believe he could behave ill to any one."

"Neither do I accuse him of doing so, my dear Miss Hannah," replied Frank. "On the contrary, I am quite as much disposed as you can be, to believe that he is acting in this matter as he believes it to be his duty to do. But *why* he thinks so, or what can possibly have happened to make him so suddenly change his opinion concerning me, I am totally at a loss to conjecture."

"He has told you that you must no longer think of his niece?" said Miss Hannah, knitting

her brows, and looking at him almost sternly. "And Miss Harrington, Mr. Frank—my dear, sweet, pretty Kate? What does she say about it?"

"Her uncle only says that Miss Harrington is determined to be guided by the judgment of her family. Here is the letter, Miss Hannah. Perhaps you will understand my position more completely by reading it."

The ready spectacles were on her nose in a moment, and she set herself very earnestly to the perusal of the document which had produced so sad an effect upon her miserable-looking visitor. Nor did one perusal of Walter's epistle satisfy her; having read it once, very attentively, she deliberately turned back again to the beginning, and read it a second time; and having done so, she rose from her chair, placed herself immediately before him, and having returned the letter into his hand, she said:

"When you make any one your confidant, Mr. Caldwell, even if that confidant be an old woman, it is a very foolish thing to trust her only by halves. Tell me, therefore, openly and sincerely, whether you are conscious of having

done anything, in any part of your past life, which could lead Walter Harrington, upon becoming acquainted with it, so completely to change his opinion of you?"

"Since reading this terrible letter, Miss Hannah," he replied, "I have asked myself the same question a dozen times, and I will now answer you as truly, my good friend, as I have answered my own heart, and that must be by assuring you that I am wholly and most completely at a loss to guess the motive for this change, or to recal any circumstance of my past life that might account for it. There are none of us, I believe, who can look back upon all the years they have lived, and find in their memory no recollection of any folly which they may rationally wish they had never committed. But I most sincerely assure you that I cannot accuse myself of anything that in my conscience I think would, could, or ought, to have produced this change."

"Then depend upon it, my dear young friend," returned Miss Hannah, cheerily, "depend upon it, there is some mistake in the matter; and if so, you may also depend upon it,

that time will clear it up. I most sincerely and heartily sympathise with you for the pain that this unaccountable letter must have given you, but I cannot consider the business in so serious a light as you do. We know that you have clear heads and honourable spirits to deal with in this matter; and when that is the case, error can never last very long."

"But where is the conceivable source of any error, my dear lady? I have no enemies, I feel sure that I have none; and if so, no one is likely to have spoken of me as being worse than I am," returned Frank, dolefully shaking his head.

"And where is the conceivable source of *any* error?" replied Miss Hannah. "The moment it is discovered, it is always declared to be inconceivable that it should ever have existed; and yet we all know that not a day passes without errors of all sorts arising, respecting all the subjects that people talk about. Inaccuracy in speaking, inaccuracy in hearing, inaccuracy in comprehending, may one and all occasion it; all which you know, my dear Mr. Caldwell, a great deal better than I can tell

you—and you would not need to be reminded of it if the case concerned anybody else. Be very sure that there is some blunder of some sort, and in all probability nothing but a little time and a little patience will be required for its rectification. At any rate, it is impossible that the matter can rest as it now stands."

"But what would you have me do to change it, my kind friend?" replied the young man, looking considerably less miserable at the bare suggestion of such a change being possible.

"If you have no friend in the world who could do it for yourself, I would have you at once address yourself to Mr. Walter Harrington, and ask him to state to you explicitly the grounds on which he had changed his opinion of you."

"Yes! I feel that this would not be asking too much, and that it ought to be done," replied Frank. "But yet," he added, in a tone of deep feeling, "I could not bear to stand before that old man, and dare him, as it were, to refuse answering me whatever questions I choose to ask."

"If you would have no objection to such a measure," said the old lady, indulging herself

with a pinch of snuff from her very capacious snuff-box, "I would, myself, very willingly undertake the task of questioning the dear old gentleman upon the subject. It is evident that the task would be a painful one to you; but I declare that it would not be in the least degree painful to me. If he should think fit to open his mind to me on the matter, well and good, and of course I should listen to him with great interest and attention; but I should ask for no confidences on the subject. My communication with him, as far as I am concerned, would consist of the simple statement of your ignorance of anything that could justify his letter to you, appealing at the same time to his sense of justice, as to the necessity of explaining himself more fully on the subject. Should you have any objection to my doing this, Mr. Caldwell?"

"My dear, kind friend!" he eagerly exclaimed in reply, "if you would really undertake this office for me, you would lay me under an obligation that I can never forget, yet never be sufficiently thankful for. But, Mr. Harrington is at this moment at a considerable distance from London, and I have no idea as to the probable

time of his return. Who knows when you may be likely to see him?"

"As soon as all this foolery here is over to-morrow," she replied, pointing rather contemptuously to the elegantly prepared table, "the married pair will, of course, move off to hide themselves in honey-moon twilight, and then I shall be at liberty to go to the land's end, if the fancy takes me. Where is Mr. Walter Harrington at present?"

"He is at Brandon Abbey, near Doucham, on a visit to Lord Goldstable," replied Caldwell.

"Then as soon as our turtles have taken wing, I will go down to Doucham," said Miss Hannah, stoutly, "and somehow or other I will contrive to get at him. I should have liked it better if the dear old man had been in his own Manor House, which is also at no great distance from Doucham. But it does not much signify. The young Lord won't murder me if I do storm his castle. It was not my fault, you know, if Kate liked you better than she liked him. D.V., Mr. Frank Caldwell, I will sleep at Doucham to-morrow night, and it

shall not be very long before you hear from me."

"I will not attempt to thank you, Miss Hannah," said the greatly comforted young man, affectionately taking her hand. "You must feel yourself that no words can adequately express my sense of the kindness you are showing me. I could not half an hour ago have believed it possible for anything to have revived a feeling in my heart so nearly resembling hope as that which your words have inspired. I no longer feel as if there was nothing in this world worth living for."

"And I don't feel it, either, Mr. Frank. I intend to enjoy my odd little journey exceedingly. And now, methinks, you are looking almost sprightly enough to be a wedding-guest. What say you? Can you not take heart enough to join our fooleries to-morrow?"

"No, Miss Hannah; I had better not attempt it. You could not be reasoning with me all the time, you know, upon the wisdom of hope, and the folly of despair. I should, in spite of all my efforts, be feeling and looking more doleful than would suit the occasion."

"Nay, as to that, Mr. Caldwell, I am quite sure that the silly little bride will be dissolved in tears the whole morning. However, I know the whole thing would be a bore to you, as well as to me, and I will not press your attendance. So good-by—we shall meet again soon, I hope; and we may both of us then be in a gayer mood, perhaps."

And so they parted. Miss Hannah being left to resume her cares respecting gelatines, trifles and champagne; while poor Frank, almost dreading to find himself alone again, wandered back to his quiet chambers in Paper Buildings.

CHAPTER VII.

MEANWHILE, the time had now arrived at which it was the annual custom of Dr. Harrington to lead his family from the overpowering and overshadowing dissipations of London, to the calm dignity that nestled round his prebended residence at Glastonbury. The exemplary divine performed his yearly orbit from London to Glastonbury, from Glastonbury to Oxford, and from Oxford again to London, in the early spring, with a regularity that had something almost solemn in it.

Judging of the importance of his presence to his London parish, as estimated by himself, and the right-minded portion of his parishioners,

deep must have been the ecclesiastical night which settled down upon the west end of London, when the rector, canon, warden, set in the metropolis, in order to rise again and dawn upon his cathedral town of Glastonbury.

But, upon the present occasion, the long-established regularity of this important transit was interrupted by the desire of Lady Augusta; and instead of passing from his house in Vale Street to his extremely well-appointed residence in the prebended "Close" at Glastonbury, the Doctor and his noble spouse, the Lady Augusta, determined upon taking a rather circuitous route, for the purpose of paying a visit to their son James at Stanton. It was a long time since the reverend Doctor had been there; for it was no light matter which could take him out of his accustomed circuit. And even their usual well-arranged and comfortably prepared-for journey was not submitted to and endured by the Doctor, without many a painful complaint of roads, and spring, and sunshine, and wind, and many other disagreeable accompaniments to the moving from one place to another. His consolation for all this was evidently found where so good a man ought to

seek it, namely, in his own conscience; for not seldom was he heard to mutter, *sotto voce*, and accompanied by a deep sigh, some allusion to his peculiar position and duties, in which the words "in journeyings oft," might be distinctly heard.

It evidently did not occur to him that all this locomotive fatigue might be avoided, if he would consent to devote all his energies, corporal and spiritual, only to one scene of exertion. But it is more than probable, that after a deliberate consideration of the subject, he had arrived at the conclusion that the monopoly of a dignitary, as pre-eminent in ecclesiastical learning and every other sort of ecclesiastical excellence as himself, might weigh heavily upon the conscience of any one congregation to which he might be induced to devote himself. There can, indeed, be no reasonable doubt whatever that he would have accused himself severely of short-coming in his professional duties, if he had, upon any occasion, refused ecclesiastical preferment; nor can it be doubted that he considered the frequent journeyings of St. Paul as an indisputable testimony in favour of pluralities.

It was but a few days previous to the usual time for this annual flitting, that the Doctor and his admirable wife, the Lady Augusta, found themselves *tête-à-tête* at their breakfast-table in Vale Street.

"I am not at all sorry, Doctor," the lady but then said to him, "that our time for leaving London has arrived. Kate's absurd conduct about Lord Goldstable has spoilt the season for me entirely. I hope you feel as well inclined to be off as I do?"

"I am ready, as you have always known me to be, my dear, at the call of duty," replied the martyr Doctor. "But I will not deny that this frequent necessity of abandoning one home, to encounter all the risks and hardships of the wayfaring which must of necessity precede my arrival at another, is becoming at my time of life a grievous and a painful burden to me! But I suppose," added the excellent man, with his usual gentle sigh of pious resignation, when contemplating the inevitable evils consequent upon our present mortal condition, "I suppose I shall die in the harness, as many another labourer in the vineyard has done before me!" And as he spoke, he gently helped himself to

a second slice from a magnificent collar of Oxford brawn, which flanked his plate.

"At least we shall have the consolation of knowing that your labour in the vineyard has not been so severe as to prevent your helping yourself to a few of the grapes, my dear Doctor," said his lady wife, who now and then yielded to the temptation of quizzing him a little when there was nobody by.

"Helping my family to them, my dear, you should say," replied the courtly Doctor, with much suavity. "The doing so is at once a duty and a pleasure. And were it not for this very sacred duty, I should, Heaven knows! be only too happy to throw off the burthen of my cathedral preferment. May I trouble you, my dear, for another cup of tea? that Pekoe has a very particularly fine flavour. Not quite so much cream, my dear, as in the last cup, if you please."

"Yes, certainly," replied Lady Augusta, after a short pause, during which she gave, as in duty bound, her undivided attention to the duties of the tea-tray. "Yes, certainly; we all of us are fully aware how much we owe you. But for goodness sake, do not talk of dying in harness yet! I am sure your last

year's journeys did you no harm; on the contrary, I thought you seemed all the better for the exercise."

"An ardent spirit, Lady Augusta, and a determined will, may carry the body through much. But it is a hard life, my dear wife! a very hard life; and that *will* tell upon the health and strength in the long run. Few persons can tell what it is, after many months of anxious and unremitting toil, among the harassing duties and responsibilities of an important London parish, to be obliged, instead of taking that repose which body and mind alike require, to be obliged to hurry off to fresh labours in distant provinces, separated by hundreds of miles of rugged roads, or else by frightfully dangerous railroads, and bad inns."

There was perhaps a little consciousness of the bathos of this winding-up which caused the Doctor to have recourse to one of his sadly-suffering sighs to assist him in this statement. But he roused himself again to add, though still with a very anxious expression of countenance: "This reminds me that I must beg you, my dear love, to take care that

the travelling chariot be sent to Jobson's, that the springs and axles may be properly looked to. And do not forget, my dear, to write in time to the man at the White Hart, at Brompton, that he may be perfectly ready to receive us at about five o'clock, as usual. He could not do better than give us a haunch of that small South Down mutton they have there. Nothing can be too simple for travelling fare. And let Barnes put up a pot of her own currant jelly. That is one of the things that one is often apt to find bad."

"But I was going to propose a plan, my dear Doctor, which would make that odious night at an inn unnecessary," replied his lady. Suppose we were to pay James a visit? We should be able to get to Stanton in one day, if we start early, even if you will not consent to go by the railroad; and there will be no difficulty in getting across from Stanton to Glastonbury."

"Humph!" pronounced the Doctor, doubtingly. "One might get across; certainly, my dear, one might get across. But I don't know what to say about those cross-roads, Lady Augusta. We never have gone that way

yet," said he, with a Conservative churchman's conviction of the strength of this argument against trying the experiment.

"That is quite true, my dear Doctor," returned the lady: "but, on the other hand, we never before had such strong reasons for trying this route. I do think, my dear Doctor, that it is highly proper and highly necessary that we should see Kate. It strikes me that we shall be greatly to blame if we do not endeavour to improve the intimacy which your brother has so very judiciously formed with Lord Goldstable. And now we have an excellent opportunity for doing this. Remember that Stanton is but three miles from Brandon Abbey."

"Yes, I know it; and I feel the truth of what you say, my dear," replied the Doctor, thoughtfully. "Walter and James, I have no doubt, are both of them doing everything in their power to bring our foolish girl to a sense of her duty; but nevertheless I feel quite as strongly as you can do, that your presence might be of the very greatest importance, and might most effectually assist them in bringing matters to the conclusion

which we all desire, and hope for. Besides, my dear, I confess that I think it would be very desirable that I should myself make a little further acquaintance with the young man. If old Dr. Barringham should drop, his deanery, you know, must be given to some one; and I happen to know that—well, well! write to James at once, my dear. I am quite sure that he will try to make us as comfortable as he can. But I remember, the old Rectory used to be full of draughts. However, if you think, Lady Augusta, that it will be for the benefit of my family that I should go there, you may depend upon it that I shall brave every danger and inconvenience. The additional fatigue may certainly be considerable. But never mind! Let it be arranged, Lady Augusta."

"I have no doubt, Dr. Harrington, that Lord Goldstable will make a point of paying a visit at the Rectory as soon as he knows you are there," said Lady Augusta. "And nothing would be so likely to bring matters to a pleasant conclusion at once. It cannot be denied that your brother, notwithstanding all his eccentricities, has shown a great deal

of tact and cleverness in his management of this affair, and I have no doubt that he will continue to do so. His contriving to become the guest of Lord Goldstable has raised him excessively in my opinion. He certainly does say strangely foolish things sometimes; but I cannot help thinking *now*, that he certainly must be a man of ability, though he is not an agreeable person."

"When we were at school," replied the Doctor, meekly, "I cannot deny that my poor dear brother was considered as a very dull boy in comparison to me. But even then, I remember perfectly well that my poor mother used to say, that Walter was no fool. And I never felt so strongly as I do at present, that she was right."

"Well then," said Lady Augusta, "I will write to James at once, and tell him our plans; and just give him a hint or two about being ready to receive us."

"I trust, my dear," said the Doctor, with a very anxious expression of countenance; "I trust that James won't think of putting us into that east room over the hall? I remember that room of old, Lady Augusta! I think

that you might give a useful hint or two on several points, my dear, respecting his manner of receiving us. A young bachelor's house-keeping arrangements are not always of the most comfortable kind, you know."

"Perhaps I had better give my sister Juliana a line," said Lady Augusta. "She knows our ways better than James does, and is quite aware of what will be necessary in the way of making you comfortable, after a fatiguing journey."

"That is a very good idea, Lady Augusta; it may be useful in many respects. I do trust that James will not be playing any foolery about fast-keeping, or any Puseyite trash of that sort. Neither my religious principles, nor my bodily health could stand it, Lady Augusta. God knows what might be the consequence to me at my time of life! And a pretty story it would make at Glastonbury and Oxford. I do trust that James will not attempt anything of the kind."

"Oh, dear no! there is not the least danger of it, my dear Doctor. James is too well aware of your principles," she added, with a slight smile, "to expose you to so painful a trial.

He will be guilty of no such absurdity, while we are with him, you may depend upon it."

"I trust you are right, my dear," replied the Doctor, with dignity. "But, my dear Lady Augusta," he continued, "there is one other point which I must mention. We shall pass next Sunday with him, and I think it highly probable that James may wish — naturally enough, perhaps—that I should preach from his pulpit. Now this I cannot do, Lady Augusta. I shall by no means have recovered from the fatigue of the long day's journey to Stanton Parva; and with the prospect of another day of equal fatigue before me when I leave it, I could not safely venture upon making any such exertion. It would be quite too much for me, nor must it be expected. I know the effect that preaching has upon me. Others may not feel it in the same degree, but I should be very wrong to attempt it, and therefore I will not attempt it. Everything tells heavily at my time of life. But perhaps James had better make it known in the parish at once, that my doing this may not be expected, and that disappointment may not ensue.

It may be as well for James to make it known in the parish, that I think it right to confine my ministry to those flocks which it has pleased Providence to intrust to me, and that I make it a point never to interfere in another pulpit. Pray let this be thoroughly understood before my arrival."

Lady Augusta promised to make this very important point clearly comprehended by her son James, and then the dignified divine retired, a little out of breath, to his study, to repose himself after the exertion he had made to make his views and wishes clearly understood, while her more active Ladyship proceeded to take the labouring oar in the needful preparations for the scheme which she had so satisfactorily arranged.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE result of this very satisfactory conversation was the immediate production of two letters by the ready pen of the Lady Augusta, and the dismissal of them to the post without a moment of unnecessary delay; for her Ladyship was too well pleased at having conquered all the difficulties, whether real or imaginary, which she had found might impede her visit to Stanton, to run the risk of any second discussion on the subject.

In truth, she was extremely sanguine as to the result of this visit. No shadow of doubt rested on her mind respecting the motive which had induced old Walter Harrington to become

the visitor of young Lord Goldstable. She looked upon her brother-in-law as a capricious humourist, whose pleasure it was to manage matters in his own way; a privilege which he doubtless considered to be the right of every rich old bachelor. But she no longer looked upon him as the sort of imbecile idiot that she had considered him to be, when she believed that he positively wished to impede the marriage of his niece with the best *parti* of the season. On the contrary, she now truly believed, not only that he wished for this splendid marriage, but that with all his eccentricities he had, probably, by keeping the young man completely under his own eye, hit upon the best possible means of ensuring it.

Such being her view of the present state of affairs, it was natural enough that she should wish to be using her influence on the mind of her daughter as actively as the worthy Walter was employing his on that of Lord Goldstable; and great indeed would have been her disappointment if she had failed in persuading the Doctor that their best way of going to Glastonbury would be by passing through Stanton.

CALIFORNIA

Her letter to her son James was as follows:

"You will, I am sure, be very sorry to hear, my dear James, that your good father has not of late been so well as usual, and I do not feel quite easy about him. Heaven knows, my dear James, that I have enough upon my mind just now, without this addition! You will easily imagine all the anxiety I must feel that the splendid proposal that has been made for your sister Kate should not fall to the ground in consequence of any childish folly on her part.

"We had at first great reason to fear that your Uncle Walter was at the bottom of this opposition of hers; but it is now evident that we wronged the dear old man, and that he had only determined upon bringing about the desired result in his own way. That he could have done nothing better under the circumstances than constitute himself the guest of Lord Goldstable, while Kate was staying with you in his immediate neighbourhood, is quite certain; but I cannot but think that my presence also at this moment might be very important. I have, naturally, more influence

than any one, with the foolish frightened girl' who really seems terrified at the idea of so suddenly becoming a peeress.

"You will, I well know, my dear James, agree with me in thinking that no stone should be left unturned when seeking the means of securing a connexion so desirable for us all, and that you will approve of my having used all my influence with your good father to induce him to brave the fatigue of the lengthened journey, in order to give me the opportunity of seeing your sister.

"We only propose remaining with you for a day or two. I shall be sorry to occasion you trouble in your house-keeping, my dear James, but your poor father's state of health requires much ease. And you must be aware that his life is very important to us all. I feel confident, therefore, that you will endeavour to make him as comfortable as possible. There are, I believe, some differences of opinion between you and your father on Church matters, but I have much too high an opinion of your good sense, to fear that you should vex your father by any display of the innovations which he so greatly disapproves. If I mistake not, you, like many

other young clergymen of the present day, make a point of dining on fish every Friday. Your father objects to this on principle ; and though I never meddle in such matters, as you well know, thinking it exceedingly unfeminine and unladylike to do so, I must say that I should be very sorry indeed to see your father attempt to dine upon fish, being very sure that it would be seriously injurious to his health.

"We shall get to you on Thursday: this hint, therefore, may be useful. I do not, however, wish to make you think that your father would object so far to accommodate himself to your views as to eat fish with you on the Friday, provided that it were of good quality (he is rather particular on that point), and that a proper dinner followed after it, which would not only prevent any danger of suffering in health, but guard against a danger which would be at least equally painful to him—namely, that of appearing to give his sanction to what he considers as a superstition at variance with the doctrine of the Established Church.

"There is one other point to be observed, my dear James. You must not on any account ask your father to do any part of the

service on the Sunday that we shall pass with you. His life, as he says, poor man, is so very laborious a one, that it is but fair that he should enjoy a holiday when it comes in his way.

"I shall write a few lines by to-day's post to your Aunt Juliana. Tell Kate that her mother sends her, by you, her most fervent blessing, and that she trusts she shall find her in a better frame of mind than when they parted.

"Adieu, my dear James,

"Always your affectionate mother,

"AUGUSTA HARRINGTON.

"P.S.—We fully hope to reach you in time for six o'clock dinner on Thursday. But at all events we shall not be later than seven, or at most, half-past."

We will now give Lady Augusta's epistle to her sister. It run thus:

"My dear Juliana,

"We have determined upon paying a visit at Stanton on our way to Glastonbury. The Doctor does not half like it, and it certainly is

a great undertaking for him. He has misgivings about James's house-keeping, which, *entre nous*, I fully share. You know what our habits are, and do just try to see that things are as decent and as comfortable as may be. You will be at no loss to guess the reasons which have induced us to take this step. Of course you will take care to let it be known at Brandon Abbey, that we are expected at the Rectory. In haste.

"Yours affectionately,

"A. H."

It so chanced that these two letters on their way from London to the post-town of Doucham, passed another letter on the road addressed to Lady Augusta Harrington, from her sister, the Lady Juliana, and it is fitting that this letter also should be communicated to the reader. The pious and right honourable lady wrote as follows:

"My dear Sister,

"As the whole of the task which my sense of duty led me to undertake when I came hither was, in all respects, a very painful one, I can

only consider the business of my present letter a natural part of it. You no doubt remember a most particularly bold and (in my judgment) very revolting-looking young woman whom that most odious person, Miss Puddingthwaite, most audaciously brought to your house on the night of your ball. I feel it due to my own principles, Lady Augusta, to point out to you that such misfortunes are among the minor judgments which such ungodly compliances with the world for ever expose us to. The creature's name, as you probably remember, was Fitzjames. The very particularly disgusting manner in which, upon that occasion, she contrived to force herself upon the notice of Lord Goldstable, was quite enough to prevent your forgetting her. I perfectly well remember your indignation at the time, nor have I forgotten the equally strong indignation of Lady de Paddington—a feeling on her part most perfectly natural and proper, from her near relationship to the young nobleman. I leave you, then, to imagine my astonishment and indignation upon hearing that your friend, Lady de Paddington, was arrived at the Doucham water establishment, accompanied by this identical Mrs. Fitzjames!

"I never, I think, was so astonished or so disgusted in my whole life as when I heard of it, and I am still perfectly at a loss to comprehend what it means, so on that point you must look for no explanation from me. I have not seen Lady de Paddington, and you will readily believe that I have no inclination to expose myself to the risk of meeting the creature whom she has chosen to make her companion.

"Perhaps, Lady Augusta, you may understand all this mystery better than I do; for my part, I cannot pretend in any way to comprehend what it means. I have not, as I have said, seen Lady de Paddington, nor do I mean to take any steps towards doing so; I will not expose myself to the risk of seeing the very decidedly doubtful creature she has thought proper to bring into her nephew's neighbourhood. I have not heard anything as yet respecting Lord Goldstable's movements since their arrival; but I should not be in the least degree surprised if I were told that he was immediately going to be married to this horrid woman. I begin to think very badly indeed of Lady de Paddington. A pretty piece of work Miss Kate has made of it!

"You must not imagine, as you are so very apt to do, Augusta, that there is the least possibility of my having made any blunder in this matter, for incredible as my statement may appear, it is nevertheless most correctly true. A most respectable lady, whose pew I have agreed to share in the chapel of a very faithful minister at Doucham (for my sitting under my nephew James is of course impossible), this lady, who is very intimate with Mr. Limpid, the doctor at the water-cure establishment, told me yesterday of the arrival of these two ladies.

"They not only, she says, came together from London, but they have taken between them the best and most expensive set of apartments in the house, which, as you well know, is not at all in Lady de Paddington's style of doing things. But doubtless her nephew can assist her *now*, if she should chance, as I suspect has happened before now, that she should want assistance!

"I hope, my dear sister, that you will not take it amiss that, after deep consideration, I should have decided upon not sitting under my nephew James, but I really think that the Doctor himself would approve my determination if

he could see how James goes on. Such impious mummeries! such candles! such keeping of days! such fasting! It was really quite impossible for me to overlook the safety of my immortal soul for the sake of pleasing James. I could not peril my hopes for all eternity by giving my countenance to such rank and undisguised Popery! And now, my dear sister, hoping soon to obtain your opinion as to what I ought to do under such very extraordinary circumstances, I remain your affectionate sister,

"JULIANA WITHERBY.

"P.S. I open my letter, my dear Augusta, to tell you that I have had a visit from Mrs. Slater, (the lady I sit with at church). She has just been calling on Mrs. Limpid, who told her that Lord G—— paid a visit last evening to Lady de P——, and remained there nearly two hours. That creature, Mrs. Fitzj——, was with them the whole time; and Mrs. Limpid is pretty sure that Lady de P—— left them together part of the time, for she is quite certain that she heard the bed-room door open and shut. This is almost too bad to believe, and perhaps Christian charity should lead me to

say that it is *possible* it may not be true. Yet I own it is very difficult to doubt it.

"J. W."

The effect which this letter produced both on the venerable Doctor and his devoted wife, may be in some degree imagined. It was with a crimson cheek and a flashing eye that Lady Augusta repaired to the *sanctum* of her dosing spouse, and totally unmindful of the hallowed tranquillity which for ever ought to reign there, she threw wide open the confidingly unbolted door, without even the ordinary ceremony of a preparatory tap, and rushing into the room threw the open letter upon the table which flanked the Doctor's easy-chair.

"I will trouble you to read *that*, Dr. Harrington, if you please!" she said, with a vehemence of tone which, if he *was* asleep, was certainly sufficient to wake him, adding rather sarcastically, "that is to say, if you can so far attend to the most important affairs concerning your family, as to keep yourself awake for half an hour."

"Lady Augusta!" he gasped, in very genuine alarm. "This vehemence greatly confounds

me! Such things are too much for me, Lady Augusta—I don't understand—I protest that—I really must beg that your Ladyship—"

"Will you read that letter, Dr. Harrington?" reiterated his wife, now speaking, however, with the calm superiority of perfect composure.

"I must beg that you will have the goodness to shut the door," replied the angry Doctor. "And may I trouble you for that flask of Eau de Cologne from the chimney-piece? This sort of thing is a great deal too much for me. I do assure you that I am not able to bear it."

"I am sorry I waked you so suddenly," said Lady Augusta, with something a little approaching to a quizzing smile.

"I slept not, Lady Augusta!" he replied, with great solemnity. "Heaven knows that I have but little leisure for repose. They who are placed as watchmen on the tower—"

Lady Augusta took up the letter again, and putting it into his hand, said, in a rather reproachful, matter-of-fact sort of tone:

"Will you be so good, Dr. Harrington, as to occupy yourself with the affairs of your family for half an hour? Here is the very strangest letter from my silly sister, Lady

Juliana. And whether we fully believe her statements or not, I think you will agree with me in feeling that we ought to pay some attention to them."

Thus urged, the Doctor (though not without a slight groan) proceeded to arrange his spectacles on his nose, and set himself to the far from easy or agreeable task of deciphering his noble sister-in-law's cross-bars.

But it soon became evident that the alarming contents of the letter more effectually roused him, and more thoroughly chased all inclination to slumber or sleep than all her Ladyship's vehemence had done.

"God bless my soul, Lady Augusta!" he exclaimed, when he reached the bottom of the first page. "This is a most extraordinary communication indeed! Yes, I certainly do perfectly well remember the very particularly handsome young woman by whom our incautious acquaintance, Miss Puddingthwaite, was accompanied on the occasion in question. But such toys, as you must well know, my dear Lady Augusta, are the last things in the world at all likely to rivet my attention. I saw her, and just looked at her, nothing more. I have

no recollection of anything farther about her."

"But this same toy," returned her ladyship, with a sneer, "seems likely enough to carry off the son-in-law you hope for; and what is to become of the Deanery then?"

"Lady Augusta!" replied her husband, restored by this inroad into his own peculiar territory, to all his ordinary pomposity; "Lady Augusta! The position which I have held in the Church for half-a-century has, I flatter myself, been such as not unfittingly to point me out to those who, under Providence, have the conferring its higher dignities without the aid or interference of any *lay* influence whatever. More especially, Lady Augusta, I am bound to point out to you that these are subjects on which it does not become your sex to enter."

"Very possibly, Dr. Harrington," she replied, with rather more indifference of manner than he thought quite becoming after so solemn a rebuke. "If, however, you wish on any other grounds," she added, "for the alliance of Lord Goldstable, it will be desirable for us

to examine into the circumstances related by by my sister."

"Assuredly, assuredly!" replied the vexed and puzzled divine. "The conduct of Lady de Paddington," he continued, "is altogether incomprehensible; and I quite agree with the Lady Juliana, that it is wholly impossible to understand it."

"And I, on the contrary, do not agree with her at all," rejoined Lady Augusta, tartly. "Juliana is a simpleton in this, as in most other things. To me, Dr. Harrington, the motives of Lady de Paddington are as visible as the sun at noon-day. Nor is she, perhaps, altogether mistaken in the conclusion at which she has arrived. Lady de Paddington is poor, Dr. Harrington, very poor for her rank, we all know that; and she has decided in her speculative meditations, that it will be more profitable for her to league with this audacious Fitzjames woman, for the purpose of making Lord Goldstable marry her, than to suffer him to marry into an honourable family, such as ours. *I* understand Lady de Paddington perfectly, whatever Juliana may do. She fancies that it will be easier to manage

a Lady Goldstable, made out of nobody, than to manage a daughter of mine! I see through it all, Dr. Harrington!"

"The motives which you attribute to Lady de Paddington, my dear Lady Augusta," replied the Doctor, looking greatly shocked, "are alike treacherous as a friend, indelicate as a woman, iniquitous as a Christian, and derogatory as a member of the aristocracy!"

There was something so soothing to the feelings of the Doctor in the delivery of this striking climax, that, when his wife modestly remarked in reply, that it was very fortunate they had already settled everything for going to Stanton, for that, after all, was the only rational thing for them to do, he replied, with an amiable smile, and a voice of the most bland courtesy:

"It is indeed fortunate that you will be on the spot, Lady Augusta, for it is an affair which evidently requires all your delicate tact and admirable management!"

"Why, yes, Doctor; I confess I think that it is quite as well I should be there. Lady de Paddington seems to forget," she added, with two or three little mysterious nods of the

head, "that there are certain circumstances which ought to make her a little cautious how she offends me. Yes! it is quite right that we should be on the spot at once. Juliana is really too silly, protesting that she cannot guess this abominable old woman's motives!"

"You are right, my dear! But we must not expect to find in every one, your powers of mind. For instance, I must confess that in respect to James also, I think she seems to show great want of judgment. What she says of his peculiarities may probably be all very much deserved, and I grieve to say it; yet surely it would have been more becoming in one of the laity, and a lady too, if she had attended the parish church, without meddling with the doctrinal opinions of the pastor. She speaks too in her letter, I see, of 'sitting under a *minister*,'" added the orthodox divine, with infinite disgust. "I do hope, Lady Augusta, that she has not suffered herself to be led into the indecency of attending any dissenting place of worship? There is no knowing what she may mean by the ambiguous term she uses—what *does* she mean by a *minister?*

I do trust that the deep humiliation of seeing a member of my family join the ranks of dissent has not been reserved for my old age!"

"These are subjects, my dear Doctor," returned Lady Augusta, very meekly, "on which, as you observed just now, it does not become one of my sex to enter."

And with these words, and with a particularly submissive air, she left the room to its accustomed stillness, and the Doctor to meditate himself to sleep again; while she returned with renewed energy to superintend all the arrangements which necessarily preceded her departure from town.

CHAPTER IX.

It so happened, that the day on which Lady Augusta's letters to her son and her sister reached Stanton had been fixed upon by the gay and particularly happy Lord Goldstable for a social pic-nic gathering, at a spot which old Walter Harrington had mentioned to him as one of exceeding beauty, at the distance of a mile or two from the Abbey.

The invitations to this pic-nic, as his Lordship chose to call the banquet, which he had ordered to be spread at the spot pointed out to him by his old friend, included, as a matter of course, his aunt, Lady de Paddington, and her friend and companion, Mrs. Fitzjames, as

well as the Rector of Stanton, and his sister, and the Lady Juliana Witherby, their aunt.

When all this was settled, and the day fixed, Lord Goldstable, from a movement of constitutional good-nature, asked Walter if he did not think that old Mrs. Cross and her handsome daughter might like to join the party?

The reply to this question was uttered precisely in the same spirit in which it was asked; and the consequence was, that old Walter volunteered to walk over to Stanton, in order to present the invitation himself to his old and much-respected acquaintance, Mrs. Cross.

The evident delight with which this honour, glory and pleasure, was accepted by both mother and daughter, was quite sufficiently evident to repay the trouble the old gentleman had taken, ten times over; and yet, this evident satisfaction was at an immeasurable distance, in point of intensity, from the real feelings of delight which caused the bosom of the fair Olivia to palpitate, as she dwelt on the delightful idea of passing almost an entire day, and it might be, some portion of the dear twilight hour also, in the presence of that glorious and

too fascinating, though fearfully back-sliding creature, the Rector of Stanton.

There were, indeed, moments in which the rapture with which this idea inspired her, positively alarmed herself; for she had hitherto succeeded tolerably well in persuading herself, that her feelings respecting him had their foundation and origin solely in her ardent desire to turn the steps of one so excellent and admirable into the way of life, instead of permitting to go on, as he had unhappily began, groping darkly through the valley of death.

And it was under the influence of this pious persuasion, that she permitted herself to think of him by night and by day, constantly comforting herself with the delightful idea, that if she gave all her thoughts, and all her energies, to the godly work, she should finally succeed by "snatching this precious brand from the burning."

This was her favourite phrase, and she murmured it without ceasing to her own heart; for it was equally soothing to her tender passion and her fervent piety. But when it

happened, the night after receiving this enchanting invitation, that she caught herself whispering to her pillow, the unweighed words: "Oh, that dear darling brand!" she began for the first time to be a little alarmed at her own condition; and secretly determined, that if he offered her his arm in walking, she would decline it, unless it happened that the road was really very rough.

Nor while thus deliciously musing, was it with any trifling degree of satisfaction that she remembered how well she knew, poor girl, how to make herself look very nice in a morning-dress, without laying out one single farthing.

Nor was her good little mother at all insensible to the pleasure offered by this good-natured invitation; for she well remembered having eaten syllabub in Bickley meadow thirty years or more ago, when her dear Nathaniel Cross was Curate of Bickley Parish, and when they were waiting to be married, till he should get a college living.

The Reverend James Harrington was also exceedingly well pleased at receiving the invitation. He liked the idea of any opportunity of cultivating the acquaintance of Lord Gold-

stable. So near a neighbour, and so wealthy a peer, could hardly refuse, if he became sufficiently intimate to ask it of him, to distribute a "daily dole" in the good old mediæval fashion —a dole, which should include his own parish, as well as that of the noble Lord; and not more than five minutes had elapsed after the arrival of the invitation, before his imagination suggested to him the great probability of his seeing his church filled at "matins," in consequence of this anticipated "dole."

That Lady de Paddington and her fair friend were well pleased, cannot be doubted, because they both immediately perceived that such an excursion, if properly managed, could not fail in giving excellent opportunities for pushing forward the business of the drama in which they were engaged. Had it not been for this important consideration, indeed, they both felt that the scheme would have been detestable enough; for the old lady hated nothing so much as being put out of her usual snug routine in any way, and the idea of fatigue of any kind was positively hateful to her.

But she had what she and her companion both called "the great object," so much at heart,

that no sacrifice appeared too great which had the promotion of it for its motive. Mrs. Fitzjames, too, though exceedingly anxious that so favourable an opportunity for love-making should not be lost, actually looked forward to it with a shudder; for had she not for hours together to be fascinating, amusing, and tender, while enduring the direful bore of a country scramble, with an odious blockhead making love to her all the time.

As for poor Kate, she was much too miserable to care greatly what she did, or where she went; her only possible source of satisfaction from the scheme, being that it might enable her to keep more out of the way of her aunt than she found it possible to do at the parsonage; while that troublesome old lady, on her side, consoled herself for the fatigue which threatened her, by remembering that the expedition would give her the best possible means of forming a correct idea of what was going on between "that creature" and Lord Goldstable, a species of information which she was particularly anxious to acquire before the arrival of Lady Augusta.

As to Walter Harrington, he was always ready, despite his age, for the enjoyment of any

scheme which had for its object a country expedition and the exploring some spot particularly worthy of notice.

And such, most assuredly, was the pretty nook known by the name of Bickley Cell. But on this occasion, he looked forward to the additional pleasure of visiting a scene which he well remembered had been a favourite with him during the rambling days of his boyhood.

This Bickley Cell had been, in old times, a small priory belonging to the Benedictine Abbey of Brandon, and in later days had attained no small celebrity among the picturesque scenery-hunters and pic-nic fanciers, from the interesting and graceful ruins of the little gothic chapel, and the wild beauty of the scenery around it. A holy well, also, of great repute in days of yore for its curative sanctity, and still renowned for its limpid purity, added to the interest of the spot, and contributed not a little towards the satisfaction of those who wished to dine with comfort and coffee.

When people are, like Gilpin's spouse, "on pleasure bent," we all know that a very slight attraction is sufficient to draw them afield; but the beauties of Bickley Cell were really sufficient

to redeem its visitors from the charge of being drawn thither solely by the hope of meeting Strasburg pie, champagne, and flirtation.

A small stream, which took its rise among some hills a mile or two to the northward, flowed towards Bickley through a deep ravine. Immediately above the site of the old priory, the general level of the soil fell suddenly, and changed its geological character, and the stream having lost its hitherto tranquil bed, took courage, and reached the lower country at one bold leap.

When the Benedictines of Brandon inhabited Bickley Priory, the waterfall must probably have been some few feet higher, and some few feet nearer their cell, so as to have mingled its music with the notes of the Bickley sacristan; and even now, though the perpendicular little cliff may have receded some feet, by the wear and tear of the fall during the last three centuries, or thereabouts, the never-failing cascade is still near enough to furnish a very harmonious *running* accompaniment to the chatter and laughter of the frequent pic-nic parties who are in the habit of spreading their gay banquets among the picturesque relics of the old building.

The spot on which those relics stood had

been chosen by those admirably good judges, the monks, in a lovely meadow at the foot of the cliff, which formed the boundary line between the higher and lower district. Above this boundary, the country was bare and bleak; but below, the whole expanse, which sloped gently towards the south, was very richly wooded.

The situation of the holy well, and the little lady-like difficulties which stood in the way of a near approach to it, were not, perhaps, among the least attractive features of this favourite excursion.

Close beside the waterfall was a huge natural grotto, or cave, which reached under the cliff to the distance of a hundred yards or more; and at the further extremity of this cave welled forth, from its rocky termination, a bright stream, which was received into a stone reservoir of very ancient workmanship, and it was this old cistern which was honoured by the appellation of the "holy well."

The entrance to this grotto was the spot at which arose the difficulty of the excursion. It was about half way up the cliff, and the path which led up to it was kept in tolerably good

condition; but the running stream, which, after filling the cistern, had worn for itself a channel, that brought its waters to a point where they were merged in the neighbouring cascade, had so meandered in its course through the grotto, that it had to be crossed by a plank before the holy reservoir could be reached.

Now this plank was not very wide, and was generally rather wet, and rather slippery. The distance, however, between the two sides of the little water-course, was only a few feet, and though a tumble into the stream would decidedly have been attended with considerable danger, from the brisk rate at which it ran to join the larger one, no fatal accident was on record as having happened there; and the pic-nic party must indeed have been badly arranged, at which there would not have been a more certain assurance of help than there was of danger in passing to and from the Holy Well.

The pic-nic, which is at present to be recorded, was most assuredly Lord Goldstable's pic-nic, on more than one ground of ownership. But it may be doubted whether it would have ever entered into his young Lordship's unas-

sisted brain to conceive a project of such bold originality.

In all probability, the first birth of the idea might be traced to that interesting hour which, if the acute ears of the highly intelligent Mrs. Limpid might be trusted, was passed *tête-à-tête* by the young nobleman and the lovely widow, in the apartment usually occupied by the said lovely widow and her faithful friend, Lady de Paddington.

To a person as highly intelligent, and as thoroughly experienced as, notwithstanding her youth, Mrs. Fitzjames certainly was, in all the mysteries of love-making, the importance of a romantic country excursion was perfectly well understood. Had it been required of her, indeed, she would have been perfectly well able, also, to set down, in numerical proportion, the respective value, in this line, of every occurrence likely to be produced by the accidents of human life.

For example: supposing the sum total of one thousand to be the amount required for the achievement of any given conquest, she would systematically have set down the relative value

of every separate manœuvre somewhat in this wise:

First sight, under all advantages of dress, one hundred.

Under disadvantage of ditto, but not presumed to be actually disfiguring, fifty. Morning occupation, with hands ungloved, and hair hanging in disorder (nicely arranged), fifty.

Caught reading a newly-arrived review (if the chase be literary), twenty-five. Transcribing music, if he be musical, one hundred and fifty.

A ball well lighted, with a good reposing room, seventy. Fancy-dress ditto, one hundred and sixty.

Caught singing an Italian bravura, or a French ballad, if you have a voice, and he has ears, one hundred and seventy-five.

To be seen at early church, if he be a Puseyite, seventy-seven.

At an evening lecture, if he be an Evangelical, seventy-seven.

To be seen darning stockings, if he be a rich miser, one hundred.

To be seen embroidering in gold and seed-pearls, if he be a poor elegant, one hundred.

A pic-nic, everything being *coulour de rose*, fifty.

Ditto with a storm, seventy-five.

Ditto with a moon, and a little dancing after, one hundred and fifty.

Ditto when matters are tolerably far advanced beforehand, two hundred.

And so on, with an infinity of items, every one of which would have shown an admirable knowledge of the human heart.

It was, of course, this last and longest recompense that Mrs. Fitzjames anticipated from proposing this pic-nic to the spot that Mrs. Limpid had, as usual, boasted of as one of the most attractive features of the neighbourhood; and the eagerness with which Lord Goldstable caught at the proposal, proved that he enjoyed the idea of being enchanted as much as she did that of enchanting.

But while thus dilating upon the talents of my beautiful Mrs. Fitzjames, I seem to be forgetting all my other *dramatis personæ*, as well as the identical pic-nic itself, which was to bring many of them together, and prove worth two hundred out of one thousand towards winning the game at which the lovely widow was playing.

CHAPTER X.

It happened on the occasion of the Bickley Priory pic-nic, as I believe it generally does happen upon all similar occasions, that a good deal of skill and manœuvring was put in practice in order to arrange the various parties in the different vehicles which were to convey them, so as, if possible, to content everybody. In no case is it very probable that this benevolent object can be completely obtained. Nor could any such perfect success be boasted of in the present instance. All that can be said in its defence is, that it would have been difficult to make it better.

Lord Goldstable had a very elegant little double-bodied phaeton which he intended to drive himself; he had also in his coach-house a somewhat lumberous old family coach, which the young owner would not have chosen to drive himself; it was, however, in perfectly good condition, and would, as his man Simpson very sensibly observed, be able, with four good posters before it, to convey all the provender with perfect convenience, and any four of the company beside.

The Rector's gig, also driven by its owner, would take two, and thus the whole party, amounting to ten (for Lady de Paddington had asked, and obtained Lord Goldstable's permission to invite their agreeable host, Dr. Limpid), found themselves perfectly well accommodated. This arithmetical process of first reckoning noses, and then seats, was easily and speedily performed; the subsequent one of deciding who and who were to be together was rather more difficult, but this also was achieved at last.

It had been fixed that the *point de départ* should be the Rectory, and at the Rectory all the party were duly assembled at twelve o'clock on the appointed morning.

The Rector had, after a good deal of consideration, made up his mind so to arrange matters as that he should drive his Uncle Walter in his gig. He felt that this would give an excellent opportunity of pressing him home on the subject of lending a helping hand to the great work of re-seating the church. He also very conscientiously intended to take advantage of the same opportunity for the purpose of setting him right upon some very important items in his theological opinions, a subject upon which he thought he had detected a very lamentable degree of ignorance in this aged, but far from well-instructed relative.

Of course it had been the intention of Lady Juliana that her niece Kate should occupy the somewhat perilous elevation of the driving-seat of the phaeton beside Lord Goldstable; while she intended herself to occupy one of the luxurious seats behind it.

Walter felt very strongly tempted to walk the distance, and meet them at the dinner-table; but all these aspirations were doomed to vanish into thin air by the will of one who was wont, when she wished for anything, not to balk her wishes from any scruples about doing

anything and everything within the compass of her power for their gratification.

It is but waste of time to mention to the reader that Mrs. Fitzjames had decided in her own mind that she herself, and no other, should occupy the post of honour and of danger beside Lord Goldstable on the driving-seat; and most assuredly his Lordship was perfectly well inclined to vote that so it should be; but the wily widow rightly judged that it might not be safe to leave this very important point solely to his discretion and management. She, therefore, with that pretty, playful air of being determined upon having her own way, which some beautiful women know so well how to assume, carried her point by the aid of her own cleverness, as she was fully determined to do.

This was not achieved, however, without a little sharp, as well as resolute, manœuvring.

The Rectory was, as we have said, the place of rendezvous before starting; and Lady de Paddington, Mrs. Fitzjames, and the joyous-looking Dr. Limpid reached it in the old coach, which had been sent from the Abbey to Doucham for their accommodation. Lord Goldstable

and Walter arrived there also a few minutes later in the phaeton.

The meeting of the ladies from Doucham, and the ladies at the Rectory, could not be expected to prove a very cordial one on either side. The only external symptom of stiffness, however, was on the part of Lady Juliana, whose reception of the two Doucham ladies was about as heartily glacial as decorum could permit it to be in the house of her nephew, of which, for the time being, she considered herself to be in some sort the mistress.

Lady de Paddington's manner, in return, was what is not unfrequently found among the scheming dowagers of *haut ton*, whose long hardening in the annealing furnace of fashionable life has imparted to them a sort of brazen courage, which effectually protects them from betraying anything like the embarrassment of shame, let their real position be such as to produce it in the most vehement degree in persons of less audacious effrontery.

The style of Mrs. Fitzjames's entrance, however, into the Rectory parlour would, to any one uninitiated into the secrets of such charmers

and their winning ways, have appeared to be the arrival of one fondly looked for among dear friends, whose well-known affection she most cordially returned.

Nothing could, in its way, be more clever than the graceful skill with which she eluded the risk of having her proffered hand refused by Lady Juliana; and this was effected by the seeming haste of the eager cordiality with which she greeted Kate. A smiling, low, and very elegant curtsey being in the same moment almost performed to Lady Juliana, while she simultaneously uttered, with the same sort of zealous *empressement*:

"I must ask you to present your brother to me, my dear Miss Harrington. I quite long to know him; for I have heard of nothing else since I came to Doucham but of his astonishing eloquence in the pulpit, and all the good he is doing here among the people. And I can tell you, from what I have already heard and seen myself, that the state of things at Doucham is such as greatly to require a little real proper religion somewhere."

It was impossible to have administered a

more judicious morsel of ecclesiastical *soft solder* than this, the materials for which had been picked up from the local gossip of Mrs. Limpid. Doucham was, in fact, a nest of low-churchmen and dissenters; and the Rev. James Harrington was not a man to listen to such a statement with indifference. He was, in fact, so completely won by the evidently orthodox words of the fair stranger, that his evangelical aunt would have found it extremely difficult to make him believe any evil report against so lovely and so right-thinking a daughter of the Church.

At that moment he would assuredly have been well contented to give up the immediate chance of leading both Walter and his purse in the right way, for the satisfaction of driving to the pic-nic a lady, whose opinions he felt sure were in such perfect accordance with his own.

He would, in fact, have liked nothing better than groaning over the theological delinquencies of Doucham to so charming and highly intelligent a listener. But this would not have suited the widow at all; so she did not hear a word of the pretty little speech he began about

flattering himself that he was a very safe driver. And how should she, when she was so eagerly listening to something that Kate was saying to her aunt about cloaks and shawls for the evening drive home?

But if she did not hear the pretty little speech, it nevertheless sufficed to put her on the alert; and no sooner had Walter and Lord Goldstable made their appearance, than the lively lady exclaimed, turning to Walter:

"Oh, Mr. Harrington! do tell me quite honestly now, do you think I may venture? Lord Goldstable has made me promise to sit by him on the driving-seat of the phaeton. But I am such a sad nervous creature."

"In that case, Madam, you would certainly find it more agreeable to go in the coach," replied Walter, secretly congratulating himself upon having thus separated his foolish young friend from the dangerous widow during the drive.

"Alas! alas!" returned the pretty lady, with a melancholy shake of the head, "you are prescribing what would be infinitely more dangerous to me, my dear Sir, than all the bold driving in the world. I dare not sit in a

close carriage this morning, for I have a headache that would make it perfectly intolerable to me. Dr. Limpid tells me I must be as much in the open air as possible. What do you say, dear Doctor? Which would be worst for me; the danger of being driven by Lord Goldstable, or that of being shut up for hours in a close carriage? Come, now, you shall decide for me."

Dr. Limpid was by no means a dull man; and he answered, not only promptly, but with considerable earnestness:

"I very strongly advise you to give up the party altogether, dear lady, rather than go in a close carriage. The road is a very safe one; you have nothing to fear; and a drive in an open carriage will do you more good than anything."

"Well then, so be it," said she, turning her eyes with a sunny smile on the delighted Lord Goldstable; "and if you do overturn poor me into a ditch, it would be quite as well, or rather better than turning anybody else there, for I know that I am but a useless sort of a person."

What Lord Goldstable said to her in reply

nobody could tell, because he stood very close to her, and spoke in a very low whisper.

Meanwhile Miss Cross had contrived to place herself at no very great distance from the Rector, and was pouring fourth with great energy, and not without some eloquence, the delight she felt at the idea of revisiting the beautiful spot which, having seen once, she had never forgotten.

"But I had no one near me then," she said, with great *naïveté*, "who could give me the slightest information respecting either the date or the original extent of the picturesque ruins."

Now this was coming quite as near to an expression of admiration for an "idolatrous superstition," as the safety of her soul would permit; nay, perhaps it was going rather farther than her conscience perfectly approved; but the temptation which beset her was too strong to resist, for was it not possible, nay even probable, that this profession of ignorance on her part might lead to the wish of imparting a little information on his? And so perhaps it might have done, had time been given him to think about it; but Lord Goldstable spared

the doubting young man the trouble of deciding between the pleasure of enlightening the mind of handsome Miss Cross, and the profit of coaxing his uncle out of money enough to re-seat his church; for his Lordship having just recollected that James was the only young man in the party besides himself, and that he could not flirt with his own sister, the good-natured youth determined that the tall beauty should be driven by the handsome young person into whose face she was looking up so kindly; and he therefore stepped gaily across the room, and said:

"Mr. Harrington, you will give Miss Cross a seat in your gig, won't you? Your hear what Dr. Limpid says about the open air for young ladies. You are not afraid, are you?"

These two questions were answered at the same moment by the gentleman and the lady. The former saying, "Certainly, if Miss Cross will permit it," and the latter declaring, with a bright blush, that she "Should like it very much, because she was not at all afraid."

Having settled this point much to his good-natured heart's content, the young Amphitryon of the day remembered that he had by no

means as yet done all that his hospitable duties demanded, but that, on the contrary, the majority of the party he had brought together still remained in a state of uncertainty as to what was to become of them. But the moment he recollected this, he set manfully to work.

"Perhaps," said he, "Lady Juliana will accept—"

But before he could add another word, Walter, who saw, or fancied he saw, a glancing of his Lordship's eye from the Lady Juliana to himself, and who was seized with a strong fear that he was about to be doomed to a *tête-à-tête* with his fine sister-in-law's fine sister, suddenly exclaimed: "I want to persuade my old friend, Mrs. Cross, to get into the phaeton with me Goldstable, that we may have a chat together about old times, old people, and old places."

Mrs. Cross looked delighted, and ardently exclaimed: "Oh, yes!" Whereupon, Lord Goldstable clapped his hands and cried "Bravo!" And then added: "Let us move off then," very rationally considering that the difficult business of dividing the company among the different equipages was concluded

as Kate, her aunt, Lady de Paddington, and Dr. Limpid, must *perforce* go in the coach, as both the other vehicles were disposed of, and there was, in fact, no other conveyance for them.

From the arrangements thus proposed and ratified there was, in truth, no appeal; but there were at least two individuals of the party who, far from being contented, had the greatest possible inclination to declare that they were suddenly taken ill, and had rather not go. The one of these, as the reader will readily divine, was Lady de Paddington, and the other, her quondam friend, the Lady Juliana Witherby.

But they both felt that it was too late to recede, and the two noble ladies stepped into the carriage with feelings as little befitting a friendly party of pleasure as it is well possible to imagine.

As to poor Kate, she cared not one single sou where she sat, or who were her companions; and as to Dr. Limpid, he would have been well pleased anywhere, for he was certain of enjoying a very good dinner, without having any patients to watch his manner of

dealing with it; and certain too, of "increasing his connexion," by the opportunity thus offered of making himself useful and agreeable as a cicerone.

To the majority of the party, the drive proved a very pleasant one. Mrs. Fitzjames was a little fatigued by the exertions she felt it her duty to make, in order to be rather more fascinating than ever; but she was repaid for it all by Lord Goldstable's whispering in her ear, as he lifted her in his arms from the last step of the lofty carriage: "If I did not think we should be married before the end of the month, I should blow my brains out."

CHAPTER XI.

And now they were all seated round the well-spread table, pretty nearly in the same manner, as to juxta-position, as during the drive. The first vehement clatter of plates, knives, and glasses had subsided, the ladies had all taken a glass of champagne, and some of them two, and the party in general began to eat less, and talk more.

"I have not yet told you the news that reached us this morning," said the Rector, turning to his Uncle Walter. "My father and mother are coming down to pay me a visit on their way to Glastonbury."

"Really!" cried Walter. "I assure you

I am very glad to hear it. When do you expect them?"

"On Thursday, to a late dinner," replied James.

"And your good father and I shall stand side by side again beneath the roof under which we were born! I like to think of it, James!" said Walter. "But I wish," he added, "that the old manor-house had been in a condition to receive them. I should like to have had my brother there for a few days at least."

"I am sure I heartily wish you were living there, Uncle Walter," returned James, with great sincerity; for his imagination carried him at once to the re-opened gates of the old manor-house, and daily doles and well-attended matins again occurred to him as blessings by no means beyond the reach of hope. "But I am afraid," he added, "that it would be impossible for you to get into it immediately."

"Perhaps before they go, my dear James," said the kind old man, touched by the evident sincerity with which his nephew had spoken,

" perhaps we may be able, if we set all the tidy old women in the parish to work upon it to get the dust swept away. I don't believe there would be much more required to make it habitable. We must see about it, James, and I must consult old Margery."

This news was far from being as agreeable to all the party as it had been to the venerable Squire. Mrs. Fitzjames started at hearing it. She was annoyed and disquieted, she hardly knew why. She certainly felt that she had no longer anything to fear from the rivalry of Kate. She looked with her bright, keen eye at the pale and melancholy girl as she sat opposite to her at the table, and to say truth, felt no more dread of any rivalry in that quarter than was inspired by the venerable Mrs. Cross who sat next to her. But such ladies as Mrs. Fitzjames are always painfully afraid of having any very intelligent eyes fixed upon them while they have any interesting affair going on, and the eyes of Lady Augusta Harrington were very intelligent. She knew too, what peril there was in every newly-turned leaf in the chapter of accidents; and things were going so particularly well with her

just at present, that it was perfectly natural she should not wish for any arrivals that might by possibility derange their course.

Lady de Paddington, too, was exceedingly annoyed by the intelligence. She would have given her Brussels lace lappets, dearly as she valued them, could she thereby have avoided coming in contact with her dear friend, Lady Augusta Harrington, till after the marriage of Lord Goldstable and Mrs. Fitzjames had taken place. She felt more and more convinced that if she faithfully continued to bestow her important patronage on the widow, she should not only ensure that fair "creature's" marriage with her silly, but very ductile young relative, but achieve beforehand such an arrangement with the future peeress, as would very effectively improve her own exchequer for the remainder of her venerable existence. And being convinced of this, it would have shown a degree of weakness unworthy the character she had sustained through life, had she shrunk from this unexpected encounter with her quondam ally, greatly as she disliked the idea of it.

Her decision upon the subject was as rapid

as it was valiant. She looked across the table at her beautiful *protégée*, and at once perceived that this unexpected news annoyed her; for the eye which had instantly sought hers, glanced from beneath a contracted brow, and all the bright hilarity of the fair face had vanished. But it was restored again as if by magic by the slight grimace and meaning smile by which her glance was returned.

There was, moreover, one other individual at table, whose gay laugh was converted into a look of dismay by the intelligence, and this was poor, dear, silly, good-natured Lord Goldstable. It was not that he in the least degree feared any impediment from the family of Kate, which would interfere with his present ardent love-fit. This was certainly no moment for any such fear on his part, for it was impossible that any love-affair could be going on more prosperously than he was conscious his own was doing. His annoyance arose solely from his regret for having permitted his cowardice and his idleness together to prevent him from keeping the promise he had so solemnly given to his venerable friend Walter, that he would rescind his hasty and very

imprudent offer of marriage to his niece, by a letter to her father.

The sudden thought that this disagreeable ceremony of formal renunciation must now be performed either by writing or speaking, caused the poor young man's face to become scarlet, and such a melancholy change from mirth to misery took place in the expression of his features, that Old Walter's kind heart could not stand it; and though he felt that the naughty boy certainly deserved to be punished, rather than pitied, he could not resist the impulse which led him to raise the empty glass beside his plate, and to cheer his repentant host by the gay challenge: "A glass of champagne, my Lord?"

This effort to restore the mirth of the meeting, which certainly for a moment had seemed on the wane, succeeded completely. The greatly comforted Lord Goldstable insisted upon it that Walter's challenge should be considered as general, and it was so received and duly honoured, save by little Mrs. Cross and quiet Kate. But the declining shake of the head by which the circulating flask was dismissed, was so quietly performed by both, that the livelier part

of the company did not percieve it, which of course spared both the old and the young lady a world of remonstrance on their social deficiencies.

A third glass of champagne, however, can rarely be taken by the more easily inspired sex without its effects becoming audible, if not exactly visible. Mrs. Fitzjames, equally charmed perhaps by the eloquent glance of Lady de Paddington and the sparkling draught which followed it, felt an irresistible inclination to propitiate the handsome Rector.

She had perceived with that ready quickness of perception with which *enchanting women* of her sort are always endowed, that the bit of ecclesiastical flummery which she had uttered during her short visit at the Rectory, had told well. It was evident to her, that it had been eagerly seized, and greedily swallowed, and she now felt herself in the humour to follow up the favourable effect she had then produced.

"What a lovely spot this is!" she exclaimed, with enthusiasm, and suffering her sparkling eyes to fix themselves, after sending their upturned glances round the enclosure, upon those of the young Rector. "How gloriously, how

touchingly lovely! Yet nature has worked only half the charm, the other half, as we must all confess, is due to art. And what an art it then was! What a nobly-inspired ambition must it have been which could have raised those mighty pillars, and turned those bold arches, that seem to defy the power of gravity, as if conscious of some magic power to resist it!"

Mrs. Fitzjames had been once taken by a very youthful lover to a lecture, in which Sir Isaac's apple-theory had been pithily brought forward, and she had a happy knack of never forgetting anything that she thought might be brought into use hereafter with advantage. She used the collection thus made, much as a patchwork proficient does the miscellaneous treasures of her work-basket, taking out a scrap, and making the most of it whenever she found a place where she thinks it would fit. Her present air of knowing well what she was talking about, answered admirably, at least as far as the Rector was concerned, for he looked both delighted and surprised.

"Those arches, my dear lady," he replied, "were indeed reared in the most palmy days of all that is sublime and beautiful; and the cre-

ative power then at work had *more* than magic in it. But let us ask ourselves," he continued, with an amiable and becoming smile, but with an aspect which had withal a mixture of sublimity in it, "let us ask ourselves, my dear Madam, *why* those were the palmy days of the true sublime and beautiful? Let us ask ourselves why all that was then produced was so truly noble, and so truly tending to elevate the mind?"

The eyes of the Rector of Stanton were of course fixed upon the eyes of Mrs. Fitzjames, and the eyes of Mrs. Fitzjames were of course fixed on those of the Rector of Stanton in return; and the eyes of all the rest of the company were fixed either upon the one or upon the other of them; but there was only one pair, and those were in the head of old Walter Harrington, which thoroughly enjoyed, and thoroughly understood, what they looked at. Like a wise man as he was, he chose the eyes of the beautiful lady for his study, and keenly did the old man enjoy the threefold expression that he found in them. Expression number one, was altogether belonging to the business of making the Rector fully aware of the excelling beauty of the said eyes; expression number two, was intended to

express an intense degree of interest in what the Rector might be about to say; and expression number three, spoke plainly enough, according to the interpretation of old Walter, though certainly not intending it at all, that she knew little and cared less about the glorious subject they were so sublimely discussing.

"If we seriously ask ourselves this question," resumed the Rector, by no means unpleasantly conscious that the whole of the party were listening to him, "if we seriously and solemnly ask ourselves this question, the answer, perforce, must be that it is not because the physical appliances possessed by the workers of these days were greater or better than those which we have at our command in these latter days; nevertheless, they were indeed glorious."

"Oh yes! they were indeed glorious," she replied, turning all the lustre of her beaming eyes upon the greatly delighted parson. "Would that it had been my lot to live in those days!" she added, in a tone of deep sensibility.

"Oh, dear me! Don't say that," cried Lord Goldstable, reproachfully, and looking as if he

did not quite understand the lovely widow's style of conversation with his reverend, and decidedly very handsome neighbour. "You forget, Mrs. Fitzjames," he added, with a melancholy accent, "that in that case the old monks would be the masters of Brandon Abbey instead of me."

There was a *naïveté* about this tender remonstrance which tickled old Walter exceedingly, and he could not help laughing heartily.

Mrs. Fitzjames, who was considerably less slow of comprehension than her adorer, blushed the colour of a bright carnation, and the look she darted at Walter might be described as a scowl, rather than a glance; but he saw it not, and said, with a good-humoured nod to Lord Goldstable:

"It must be admitted, my Lord, that in this case, as in many others, there would be considerable inconvenience in pushing the world backwards for three hundred years; and I would decidedly not barter your Lordship as a neighbour, against a society of monks. Nevertheless, it must be confessed, I think that the architecture of our reformed days does not

equal in beauty the works which were achieved in that line by the unreformed. We call those ages dark, and dark enough they were in many respects, but certain it is that our lights have not enabled us to raise such noble fabrics as they did."

"That is, I believe, acknowledged on all hands," replied his nephew; "and as all our material resources are undeniably more ample," he continued, in a very decidedly triumphant tone, "and as all our facilities for producing such works are incomparably greater than theirs were, what other explanation for so remarkable a fact can be assigned, save that which I was pointing out?"

The widow, who had no sort of intention or inclination to be set aside or condemned to silence by the saucy laughter of so antiquated and quizzable an individual as old Walter, again fixed her eyes with a pretty, pensive, meditative air on the face of the Rector, and replied:

"Oh, yes, it is so indeed. You are so right, Mr. James Harrington! Assuredly those arches could never have been built," she added, with an uplifted eye, and an exquisitely beautiful hand directed towards them, "without faith; oh! not

without a great deal of faith in—the Scriptures."

The Rector looked a little annoyed, but Miss Cross looked absolutely disgusted. She had previously felt not a little indignant at the obvious encroachment which this beautiful unknown was making on what she wished to make a strict preserve, and she could not refrain from saying, with a bitterness at once feminine and theological:

"You forget, Ma'am, that the people were deprived of the use of the holy Scriptures in those days, so it can't be *there* that we must look for the spirit which inspired the building of these beautiful, but often Pagan-like edifices."

Mrs. Fitzjames, in return, bestowed upon the rustic damsel a thoroughly fashionable stare; and then, with a little smile expressive of a sort of playful compassion at the poor girl's ignorance, but with a tone which was intended effectually to put her aside, she said, with a look of beautiful intelligence fixed upon the Rector:

"These pretty ruins are very old, no doubt;

it is quite certain they could not be so beautiful if they were not so. But they are not quite so old as the Bible, I believe."

"Do you allude to the Old or the New Testament, Mrs. Fitzjames?" said wicked Walter, with a treacherous smile.

It was by no means in his usual way thus to supply the rope with which an entangled ignoramus might accomplish suicide. But he thought, very conscientiously, that Mrs. Fitzjames was not only fair game, but that he might do more good than harm by leading her to show herself off a little.

The acute widow instantly felt conscious that somehow or other she had been quizzed by the odious old man; but she had no intention to be brow-beat by a half-crazy old grey-beard, and she replied, with a little scorn, and a great deal of sparkling vivacity:

"Oh! the Old Testament of course."

Miss Cross opened her large black eyes to their widest extent, and fixed them on the face of Walter. Kate stole at the same moment a half glance at the old man, and ventured a slight shake of the head as a reproof for his wicked-

ness. It was only to the look of the former lady, however, that he thought proper to reply:

"My dear Miss Cross," he said, "you look as if you had never before heard anybody talk of matters of which they were ignorant. If this be the case, you have had better luck than I have. Though to be sure the present case *is* rather remarkable."

Walter would never have said this, or anything else approaching it in severity, had it not been that he was fully aware of the decidedly nefarious attack which the beautiful lady was making upon his very guileless and very helpless *protégé*.

Seeing her as he saw her, and understanding her object as he understood it, he felt it to be a positive duty to give her a check whenever he found an opportunity of doing so.

The widow, however, appeared to be wholly unconscious that what he said had any application to her, and she turned as smilingly as ever to the real business of the hour, which notwithstanding her admiration of the Rector's good looks, she remembered, with very perfect

constancy, was the exerting all her fascinations, in order to have and to hold the luckless boy at her side, and everything that belonged to him.

Nor had she, on returning to this her vowed duty, the least reason to suspect that her recent blunder, if she had made one, had produced any mischievous effect on him, for he greeted the renewed glances of her eyes, and the soft dimples of her smiles, with unmitigated delight.

But the Rector was not to be unhorsed from his favourite hobby by the discomfiture of an ally, whom it was certainly not his intention to accept as an authorised advocate of his cause. He therefore resumed the conversation, by addressing his uncle.

"But to return to what I was saying, my dear Sir," he resumed, "I really wish you would tell me what cause you can hit upon to assign for the confessed superiority of the mediæval church architecture over that of modern times, if you do not find it in the purity and intensity of the genuine Church spirit by which society was then animated, and, as I may say, inspired.

Most emphatically, and most truly might those ages be designated as ages of faith, and, in lamentable contradistinction to the rank materialism amidst which we live, as spiritual ages."

"Your question, my dear James," replied his uncle, "is one which has often occurred to my own mind; but my meditations on it have led me to a conclusion which I fear may startle you, for it is in direct contradiction to your own. It is my conviction, James, that if the question were philosophically analyzed, it would be found that it is precisely because we are more spiritual-minded than our forefathers that we no longer rear such magnificent fabrics, and not because we are less so."

The astonished Rector was silent for a moment, being too completely dismayed by so monstrous a proposition to find ready words to answer it; but then he said:

"I must confess, Sir, that your paradox is not only startling, but so wholly incomprehensible to me that I have no conception of your meaning."

"Well, my dear James," replied the old man, with a good-humoured smile, "I have no parti-

cular wish to dogmatize on so grave a subject at so gay a moment; but I can tell you, in a very few words, how the matter strikes me. I have little, or rather no doubt, but that structures equal or superior to any of those which we so much admire, might be raised at the present day, provided only that the requisite funds were forthcoming."

"Well, Sir!" cried James, triumphantly, "you surely have mistaken your brief, as a celebrated barrister is once said to have done, and are advancing directly to my conclusion, instead of to your own. I perfectly agree with you as to the possibility of raising such edifices. But *why* are not the funds forthcoming?"

"Why are not the funds forthcoming?" returned the old man. "Ay, James, that is, indeed, the question. During your favourite ages of faith, people of all sorts, old men and maidens, young men and children—ay, and old women, too, who by no means ought to be left out — all eagerly contributed their substance, and their power, and energy, in various ways to the great work of rearing magnificent churches, and filling them with costly decorations, in order to demonstrate their piety as a claim to eternal

reward. But the reformed worshippers of latter days take a different view of the investment. People of all classes would still willingly contribute their substance and their energy to the achievement of vast and sublime works, only they wish first to know what percentage of interest they would receive in return. You may depend upon it, that Gothic cathedrals would be springing up in all directions, if it could only be ascertained that there would be a return of five per cent. for the money expended on them."

"Once again, my dear uncle," returned James, "I cannot help saying that if I were arguing in support of my own opinion, I could not do it so ably as you are now doing it for me."

"Have a moment of further patience with me, my dear fellow. We shall soon reach the point at which our roads diverge; and after that, I believe you will find that they proceed diametrically right and left," returned Walter.

"We appear to agree in thinking that the reason why people do not build many cathedrals now-a-days is, because they do not perceive that they will get a good remuneration for money so

invested. That they did during the ages of faith believe that they should receive a rich return for money so invested, you do not doubt, nor I either. Nor can we either of us reasonably deny that no degree of worldly wisdom could suggest a more profitable investment for superfluous, wealth than the purchasing an eternal annuity of heavenly beatitude. Let a prudent capitalist be made *practically to believe* that he can make his money available to such a purpose by expending it in building churches, and the work would begin forthwith. But the present age refuses, for the most part, to believe that man can enter into any such compact with his Maker; and I must confess that I think his refusal indicates a much higher degree of spirituality, and a much more sublime appreciation of things unseen, than can possibly be shown by accordance with the contrary principle."

"You are now entering upon ground, Sir, where it is impossible I should follow you," replied James, hastily, and with a visible augmentation of colour. "I dare not listen to you, Sir. Your arguments evidently tend to an abyss of heresy that I dread to contemplate, and would embrace consequences which

I am able dimly to perceive through the mists of your sophisms, but which I would really rather not approach more nearly."

"And I, my dear nephew," replied the old man, mildly, "cannot see that good can arise from discussion with one who dreads to follow wherever a conscientious wish to discover truth may lead him. Moreover, I readily admit," he added, in a lighter tone, "that this is not exactly the fitting time and place for such a discussion. Will you take a glass of champagne with such an unorthodox old fellow as your uncle?"

"With all my heart, my dear Sir," replied James, almost as cordially as if he had been so challenged by the most Puseyistic bishop on the bench; "and I am quite sure," he added, doubtless for the purpose of reconciling his pious spirit to so very tolerant an act, "I am quite sure, that if you would only listen to the teaching of the Church—"

"At Stanton, or at Doucham, my dear boy, shall it be?" returned the old man, with a merry eye. "And now," he added, "as I think we have all done dinner, I propose an expedition for the purpose of exploring the perilous passage to the holy well. But you

must not mistake what I have been saying to you, James," said Walter, drawing near his nephew, and laying his hand affectionately on his shoulder. "You are not to suppose that I am second to any in my veneration of the holy feeling, which has often caused such temples as this has been, to rear their bold columns towards the sky, or that I am insensible to the value of their spiritual use. I hope and believe that the age is becoming more and more sensible of this, and will continue to do, as intellectual and truly spiritual culture increases."

No sooner had old Walter risen, than Lord Goldstable was on his feet also.

"Now then for our beautiful romantic walk," he cried; "I am longing for the delightful grotto that the Doctor talks about."

When Lord Goldstable rose, of course everybody else rose also; and scarfs were resumed, and parasols sought for, with every appearance of eager interest in the proposed expedition.

CHAPTER XII.

But notwithstanding all this apparent zeal, the proposition of visiting the holy well was not acccepted unanimously. They all rose indeed, and all the ladies appeared to prepare themselves for walking; but Lady de Paddington said something about damp, and about catching one's death from cold in those wild, strange underground sort of places.

Litttle Mrs. Cross had visited the holy well a great many long years ago, but she remembered it just as well as if it were but yesterday; and she thought, and said, that the air of the grotto would certainly do no good to her rheumatism.

Lady Juliana candidly confessed that, for her part, she had no pleasure in contemplating the memorials of idolatry and superstition; and that, in her opinion, it would be a great deal better to let them sink into oblivion and be forgotten, instead of making them a show.

Dr. Limpid, although assuring these three ladies that they had no reason to fear either damp or draught, provided they would only be faithful to cold water, nevertheless very politely volunteered to remain with them during the absence of the rest of the party on this exploring expedition. This offer was accepted as civilly as it was made; and the separation of the two squadrons immediately took place.

Old Walter, who never missed any opportunity of seeing anything, and who on the present occasion was especially anxious to examine the changes the action of the well-remembered stream had made in the spot since he had last seen it, was the first to step forward in the right direction; and Kate, who was ever well pleased to look at anything when her uncle was showman, looked at him with almost one of her usual smiles, as she took his arm. The Rector, who had of course much too sincere a

veneration for Saint Bridget to fail in visiting her holy well whenever a favourable occasion for doing so offered, was more than usually so on the present occasion, and felt eager to recount the legend to any one whose ear he felt conscious he could command so completely as that of the fair Olivia; and the fair Olivia was too much delighted by the offer of his escort and his arm during the expedition, to listen to any scruples of conscience concerning the probably superstitious turn of his conversation, and continued to satisfy the inward monitor by the ever-present consideration, that her only chance of ultimately saving him, was by first making him her own for ever and at all hazards.

As to Mrs. Fitzjames, she really manifested a high sense of duty, and of that first of duties —namely, the duty which she owed to herself, by the alacrity with which she obeyed the signal to move; for she had made a very good dinner, and really felt exceedingly comfortable where she was; whereas the exertion she was now called upon to make, was in every way distasteful to her. She hated a country walk beyond all things; and the having to listen and respond to all the wearisome ardours of Lord

Goldstable's tender passion was a bore of the most ponderous quality. But no price was too great to pay for the glory of becoming a wealthy peeress; and radiant was the smile with which she started up to encounter all the promised perils by land and water, which were to throw her upon the masculine protection of the silly boy who was of course to be her escort. She detested the idea of going into the nasty, damp, dirty hole that had been described to her; but the nicest observer would have failed to detect any trace of such a feeling in the tone with which she exclaimed:

"Oh! I shall so like it!"

Lord Goldstable's delight was quite as genuine as hers was false; and the gentle pressure with which she returned the ardent grasp with which he took possession of her arm, would have convinced him that he was fondly beloved, even if he had not been tolerably sure of it before. So while the oddly composed group of the three elder ladies, and Dr. Limpid, remained sitting, and perhaps dosing, under the shade and shelter of the old Priory wall, the three pair, composed of Walter and Kate, Lord Goldstable and the widow, and the Rector

and Miss Cross, sallied forth on their romantic expedition.

"Was it not awful, Mr. Harrington," said the handsome Olivia, as they energetically stepped forward in the van of the party, "was it not really awful to listen to the soul-destroying ignorance displayed by that presumptuous lady from Doucham? I really did not think it possible that in these latter days any Christian could be so profoundly ignorant."

"Ignorant certainly," replied the Rector; "yet, nevertheless," he added, in a tone of gentle toleration, "she seemed inclined to listen to the teaching of the Church," replied James, who belonged to that class of teachers who have far more indulgence for ignorance linked with submission, than for information if allied to independence. "But, as I was telling you," he resumed, "she received the veil from the nephew of St. Patrick."

"What did she receive?" asked Miss Cross, opening her fine eyes, as she looked up to him with an expression of extreme astonishment.

"She received the veil," replied the Rector,

gravely. "You know the meaning of that phrase, I suppose?"

"Oh yes! certainly I do. But of whom were you speaking?" returned the lady.

"Of the holy Saint Bridget," he replied, a little stiffly. "I thought you would like to hear some of the particulars of her singularly interesting history."

"Oh yes! indeed I should. For I am very fond of history," returned poor Olivia, colouring vehemently from the struggle that was going on within her between her religion and her love.

"Saint Bridget's story is a highly suggestive one," replied James, a good deal mollified by the evident eagerness of her wish to listen to him. "Saint Bridget, Miss Olivia, became superior of a little knot of holy women who wished to devote themselves to religion under her guidance; and she constructed a small cell under the shelter of a majestic oak, which grew at no great distance from the place where she was born. The spot was thence called *kill dara*, or the cell of the oak, a name retained to the present day by the town of Kildare, which, in

process of time, arose round the site of the nunnery."

"And is it known what connexion there was between this Irish Saint and the well here, which is called by her name?" said Olivia.

"I am not aware that any legend has been preserved," he replied; "but, in all probabililty, some relic—it may even have been one of her holy bones—must have found its way hither; and being deposited where the well rises, may have been found to perform miracles. Saint Bridget is known to have been very powerful in working miracles," he added, with a simple matter-of-fact air, as if he had been speaking of a well-known event which had occurred the day before.

"Oh, Mr. Harrington!" cried the sorely-tried Olivia, with a heavy sigh.

"Of course they were duly examined into, and satisfactorily proved at the time of her canonization," rejoined the Rector, exactly in the tone he might have used, if speaking of one who had been tried and found guilty, or innocent, at the Old Bailey.

Meanwhile, Walter and Kate, who followed

next in the line of march, were engaged on a little lecture on geology, which the old man probably thought was a safer theme, notwithstanding all the dangers of infidelity which have been attributed to it, than anything connected with the sad subject, which, in truth, occupied the thoughts of both.

Taking his text from the illustrations furnished by the action of the Bickley stream within the period of his own memory, old Walter pointed out to his attentive listener the great part which the incessant labourer, *water*, played in the arrangement and fashioning of our globe.

"It is curious to reflect, is it not, my Kate, that all the myriad tons of soil composing the rich plain that stretches away yonder with such glorious fertility, have been carried atom by atom, from the hills in front of us?" said the meditative old man.

"There are very few things which excite so agreeable a state of mind," replied Kate, "as the being able to trace the great and universal operations of nature with the certainty afforded by common sense. When we are so occupied,

we feel that we ourselves assuredly do hold an exalted place among created things. But these waters, I presume, uncle, are not the only agents in this vast operation?"

"It is rarely, if ever the case," replied Walter, "that any of the operations of nature, whether sublime from their stupendous immensity, or astonishing from their marvellously delicate minuteness, are effected by one operating agent. In such geological changes as that before us, not a frost or thaw occurs, not a grass or lichen germinates on those hills, without preparing and helping forward the work of their disintegration. The beautiful harmony, which a little observation will enable us to trace through the infinitely diversified operations of nature, is to my mind one of the most irresistible sources of adoration to the Divine Creator."

And so they talked, till they almost forgot the companions of their walk, and the object of it.

The conversation of the third couple offered another variety. It is certain, however, that in this case also the gentleman talked of *adora-*

tion to his companion; but it was of a kind quite different from that discussed either by the philosophical Walter, or his ecclesiastical nephew. The discourse of Lord Goldstable and Mrs. Fitzjames was, indeed, a good deal interrupted by a multitude of little adventures occasioned by the heedless stepping of the lady, and the impassioned eagerness of the gentleman in assisting her; but notwithstanding these dangerous little accidents, the delighted youth declared again and again, and with the most perfect sincerity, that he had never enjoyed a walk so much in his whole life—"No, never!"

His fair companion also had formed an opinion equally decided upon the pleasures of the expedition. She felt convinced at the very bottom of her heart, that no woman had ever made so detestable an excursion, or been made love to by such a booby and bore as her companion. But, nevertheless, her resolute purpose was not changed, nor did her courage—her noble courage—give way. She could still "smile and smile;" and so she did, till the poor, guileless boy felt persuaded that she was

quite as much delighted, and quite as much in love as himself.

And in this manner the tripartite company passed under the dripping ledge of rock, which formed the roof of the grotto. Walter talked geology, James talked legendary lore, and Lord Goldstable whispered soft things, till at length Mrs. Fitzjames, thinking she had fully accomplished the task she had set herself, began to express some very serious fears, that the damp of the grotto might cause her death.

The agitation of poor Lord Goldstable at hearing these terrible words, uttered in a tone of sweetly resigned gentleness, was very vehement indeed; and hastily declaring that he wished the holy well, which, though it was at the farthest extremity of the cavern they had safely reached, at the devil, he said they must instantly turn back, and get away as fast as possible.

Now, it so happened that a pair of idle urchins, who had been stationed to frighten away the crows from a neighbouring corn-field, had been attracted by the arrival of the gentlefolks at the Priory, and had quitted their post, in order to follow them at a respectful distance, in the hope of receiving a splendid sixpence, as

a reward for their services as ciceroni at the legendary precincts of the holy well.

Opportunities of this sort were by no means of very rare occurrence; and the experience of the young chroniclers had taught them that their services were, for the most part, welcomely received, when offered in the dim recesses of the grotto; but that they were pretty regularly pooh-pooh'd away, if they bothered the gay folks as they walked towards it.

On the present occasion, they had hung back, and in fact kept out of sight till they had seen the whole party cross the plank, which served as a bridge over the little rapid stream, which, having overflowed the holy cistern, had worn for itself a channel, which led it to join the waterfall, as before described. The two unseen attendants of the party had permitted the three gentlemen to hand the three ladies over the plank before they themselves entered the grotto; but this passage being accomplished, the two boys rushed eagerly forward, each of them eager to be the nearest to the party, and foremost in proffering the services for which they hoped to be paid. But while thus jostling each other, the fore-

most of the two managed to strike his clouted shoon against the plank with such violence, that he dislodged it from its narrow holding on the bank, and caused it to fall with rather an appalling splash into the stream. The boys, who were lucky in escaping the same fate themselves, instantly took to their heels, and ran back to their forsaken post in the corn-field, steadfastly determined to ignore the whole business, should any inquiry into the matter be made.

It was with no small dismay that the party heard the sound of the falling plank at the very moment that, in compliance with Mrs. Fitzjames's wish, they had turned away from the well, in order to leave the grotto with as little delay as might be; and upon reaching the stream, and perceiving that their retreat was thus suddenly cut off, the wish that they were all safely beyond the precincts of the said grotto certainly became general, though varying in degree. The width of the little stream did not exceed four feet, perhaps it was not so much; but the banks were on both sides wet and slippery, and the light by no means sufficient to permit a very satisfactory examination of the ground. Had it not been for this obscurity,

there would have been little difficulty in the matter, a firm foot, and a sure eye, being all that was necessary to ensure a safe arrival on the further side. Olivia Cross and the Rector were the first of the party who reached the spot.

"There has been an awkward accident here, Miss Cross," said the gentleman, looking with rather a blank air at the unbridged stream before them. "I could cross easily enough myself, I dare say; but really I do not see how the ladies are to manage."

"Oh, it is nothing, Mr. Harrington!" cried the eager Olivia, gaily, "I am not the least afraid. Let me go first, shall I? When I am across, I'll stretch out my hand to you. Let me, will you? I am quite sure of myself at this sort of work."

"Oh, Heaven! what is to become of us?" screamed Mrs. Fitzjames, in the most vehement agitation. "Oh, Edward," she softly murmured in the ear of Lord Goldstable, "all escape is cut off, and we shall perish by famine in this dreadful spot. At all events, my own Edward, we shall perish together!" she added, in a manner which seemed to indicate that *together*,

in her affectionate interpretation of the word, signified *as one*, so closely did she cling to him as she uttered it.

"Well, but, Sophia dearest, I can jump," replied the brave young nobleman. "I am a monstrous good jumper—I am, upon my word and honour—and I would jump over anything in the world to save you, my dear, beautiful Sophia! And so here goes!" And as he spoke, he gently shook her off, and put himself in act to spring. But his Sophia had no notion of being treated in that mater-of-fact sort of style, and clutched him tightly in her arms, uttering at the same moment a shriek that made the vault of the cavern ring again.

"What a fine echo!" said Walter, drily, while approaching with Kate to the point where they had left the plank, and reaching it just as the magnificent scream of the beautiful lady had ceased to vibrate. "I wonder who has been so mischievous as to break down our bridge behind us?" he added, laughing. "Some wicked wag, I trow. Do you think you can skip across it, Kate?"

"Oh yes, very easily," she replied. "But

I should like you to skip across first, Uncle Walter, that you may stretch out a hand to steady me on my arrival, for the bank on the other side looks wet and slippery."

Walter nodded his head, and placing his stout stick firmly on the edge, and with a movement, that was half a jump and half a stride, was in an instant on the other side; and then, rendering his position firm, despite the mud, by means of grasping with his left hand the corner of a rock very conveniently within reach, he stretched his right out to meet that of Kate, who with that assistance made her transit to the other side with a movement as fearless as his own.

"Well done, Kate!" cried the old man, gaily. "And now, ladies, what can I do for you? Shall we send men with ropes and planks from the village? Or do you think that you can play at 'follow the leader?' Come, Miss Olivia! I suspect that if you had been alone, you would have found your way across long since."

"If Miss Cross is really not afraid," said the Rector, "I have no doubt that I could pass her across as safely as you did my sister."

"Oh, I am not the least afraid, if Mr. James Harrington will give me his hand," said poor Olivia, with a blush.

"Certainly I will, Miss Olivia," replied the Rector, leaping across as he spoke; and then following his uncle's example, by grasping the jutting crag, he stretched across his other hand to meet that of his long-legged companion. But Olivia, animated by the energy which characterised all her movements, immediately made so vigorous a spring towards the gentleman, that the momentum imparted to her person not only sufficed to carry it to the opposite side of the little stream, but completely to overpower the resistance opposed to it by the person of the well-grown, but not very stoutly-built, young clergyman; and the bank being very slippery, they both lost their footing, and measured their nearly equal length upon the ground.

Olivia was the first to recover her feet, and then eagerly offered her hand to assist the prostrate Rector to rise. He declined this assistance by uttering, as he rose without it, "Thank you," in rather a ceremonious accent, the coldness of which was greatly more chilling

than the wet mud to the feelings of the unfortunate Olivia. However, upon the whole, the young man behaved very well, for he too was exceedingly mortified; his dignity, as a priest, having been as painfully wounded by his tumble, as her vanity, as a woman, by his cold reception of her proffered aid; so that there was some merit in the effort which enabled him to say, in about a minute after he had recovered his feet:

"I hope you have not hurt yourself, Miss Cross?"

"Vaulting ambition hath o'erleaped, not only itself, but you into the bargain, James," said Walter, laughing. "But never mind, you will neither of you be the worse for the adventure half an hour hence. A little of this pleasant sunshine that we have got back to, and a touch of a clothes-brush, will soon set all to rights again."

And so it fell out that Lord Goldstable and Mrs. Fitzjames were left alone on the wrong side of the gap.

"Do you think, dearest," whispered the enamoured young man, in the very tenderest of

tones, "that you could manage it as they have done? I don't mean like Miss Cross," he added, "but like Miss Harrington. I think I could receive you on the other side better than the parson did Miss Cross."

"Oh, Edward! how can you propose to me so frightful an attempt? Am I formed to scramble about like that horrible giantess of a girl? As to Miss Harrington, it is evident she is a romping school-girl, and I dare say she would climb a tree if her uncle told her to do it. Your affianced wife, my Edward, has been reared with more refinement."

"But what are we to do, my beautiful angel? If we are ever to get home again as long as we live, we *must* cross that ditch. Come now, Sophia, let's have a try, and jump together, hand in hand."

"Nothing on earth could induce me to attempt it!" replied the lovely widow, solemnly. "Oh, Edward! how could you dream that it was possible for such a creature as I am to clear that hideous chasm at a leap? Alas! I am not formed for such exploits. No, Edward, let us remain here together, and be forgotten. It

is a sad fate for creatures so young, but at least we shall be together. Not that I would refuse to be saved, if you yourself would be my preserver. If you thought that you could clear the yawning abyss with your poor Sophia in your arms, I would venture, so encircled, to brave the attempt. If we escape, I shall owe my life to you; and if we perish, we shall perish together!"

"Dear, lovely Sophia!" replied the soft-hearted boy, with something very like a sob, "I am sure it is enough to melt a heart of stone to listen to you. At all events, I'll do my very best; so let me try, dearest." And so saying, he took the very pretty little lady in his arms, much as an indulgent nurse might take up a tall naughty child, who prefers being carried to walking.

"Oh, you are no weight at all! I am quite sure that I can jump across as easily with you as without you. So here goes!" And so saying, he retreated for a step or two to take a little run at it, and then, with a youthful, active spring, he alighted with his fair burthen in perfect safety on the other side.

"Bravo, Goldstable! well jumped," cried Walter, who had been looking on with great amusement, though he had not heard the tender whisperings which had preceded the feat; "but it was a silly thing to attempt," added the old man, "you might both of you have very easily got a ducking." And having said this, he gave his arm to Kate, and prepared to walk back to the ruins.

But the widow, who had been perfectly well aware that she had run some risk by being carried across the gap, and who had very deliberately determined upon running it for the sake of what she intended should follow, was not to be easily foiled in her object. So heaving a very profound sigh, she sank gracefully upon the ground, and with one melting glance up into the face of Lord Goldstable, fainted away!

Walter looked at her for half a moment, and then quietly drew forth his watch, remarking that it was getting late, and quite time that they should be looking for the carriages.

Lord Goldstable looked very uncomfortable, but kept his eyes fixed upon his Sophia, calling upon her in a very piteous voice, yet not seem-

ing to think, nevertheless, that she was positively dying; and by degrees, in consequence of taking off her bonnet, letting her hair fall about her face, taking off her gloves, and bathing her forehead with eau-de-Cologne, he succeeded at last in persuading her to open her eyes.

"My deliverer! my preserver!" she cried passionately, clasping her hands, and looking wildly up into the sky. "Oh, Edward!" she softly murmured, "I shall never forget this hour as long as Heaven gives me life and recollection. Never, no never, shall I cease to remember the heroic courage and devotion with which you risked your precious life to save that of your poor trembling Sophia. May I live to reward you for it, by a whole existence of love and gratitude!" And here she covered her face with her hands, and appeared to weep.

It was evident that these tears relieved her; for perceiving, upon looking up, that the rest of the party were so far in advance as to be very nearly out of sight, though a good half mile of the road was visible, she "sat herself to rights," and declared that she was quite ready to return to their friends.

"And oh, my Edward!" she cried, "with what delight shall I recount this day's noble deed to Lady de Paddington! She is already well enough inclined to be proud of you; but, ah! what will she say to me for suffering you to risk your precious life to preserve mine?"

And with such honey-sweet talk the way was easily beguiled, till they reached the spot where the elder ladies, and the still smiling Dr. Limpid, awaited the return of the party. The perils they had encountered furnished a most interesting narrative, which lasted till the carriages were ready; and the various commentaries upon it, furnished ample matter for conversation during the drive home; and on the whole, Mrs. Fitzjames, who was by no means a bad judge, considered that the pic-nic had been very successful.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FEW days after the pic-nic at Bickley Priory, Walter Harrington and Lord Goldstable were sitting over their breakfast-table at Brandon, when the unfortunate young host had again to be reminded that he had not yet redeemed his promise of releasing Kate from the embarrassment he had brought upon her, by informing her father that he resigned all claim to her hand. As far as his niece herself was concerned, Old Walter very frankly confessed that no such avowal on the part of his Lordship was necessary; but the case was different with respect to the rest of the family. It had been quite in vain that, in the first

instance, Kate had explicitly declared that she neither had, nor ever would, accept Lord Goldstable; her refusal was treated by her father, mother, aunt, and younger brother, as the petulant coquetry of a silly girl, who thought she had not been sufficiently made love to as yet.

Had she not received the fatal blow which had so cruelly destroyed all her hopes of a union with Caldwell, she would have attached more importance to this silly delay on the part of Lord Goldstable, and so would her uncle also; and it was this which had led him to permit above a week to pass without again insisting on the foolish boy's redeeming his pledge. But Kate had reminded her uncle that she should now be in danger of a much more active and authoritative persecution on the part of her mother, than she had as yet endured on the part of her aunt; and, moreover, that her father would be likely to treat the subject, notwithstanding all the absurdity mixed up with it, in a style of solemnity, that would effectually overwhelm all her efforts to make that absurdity visible to him. "In short, dear uncle," she

said, during their homeward drive from the pic-nic; "in short, there is nothing which can save me from a persecution, which I do not feel very able to bear, but Lord Goldstable's keeping the promise which he made you. Do you not think," she added, with a touch of her former playfulness, "that if you were to tell him that I had quite made up my mind to accept him, if he delayed the performance of his promise any longer, it might act as a spur?"

"Perhaps it would, Kate," replied Walter, with a laugh, which would have been more genuine had poor Kate been less perfectly at liberty to perform the threat, as well as to utter it. The same thought probably occurred to both; for both became silent, and remained so for a minute or two.

When their drive was over, however, and Kate set down at the Rectory, Walter returned to Brandon, very fully determined to attend immediately to her remonstrance; but accident had prevented his doing so. In the first place, the late hour at which his young host breakfasted, made it very inconvenient that they should take that meal together; and after

Walter had breakfasted he was sure to be off to superintend the labours of old Margery and her assistants; and when he got back to the Abbey, he found he had but barely time to prepare for dinner, at which ceremony Lady de Paddington and her fair friend invariably assisted. It was absolutely necessary, however, that this long-delayed business should be achieved, and Walter had accordingly waited for his breakfast till Lord Goldstable came down and joined him.

After a little idle chit-chat respecting the preparations that were going on at the Hall, Walter said: "I wish, my Lord, that you had followed my advice, and written to my brother when you first came down here. I told you then, if you remember, that the business would not become less disagreeable by being delayed."

"But I am sure, Mr. Harrington, I never thought there was any danger of the Doctor's coming down here," replied Lord Goldstable, looking very red. "If I had, I would not have lost a day in writing."

"I assure you, my young friend, that I had no more idea of it than you had," replied

Walter. "As it is, however, there is now no possibility of avoiding the saying, what it is absolutely necessary you should say, by word of mouth."

"Why don't you think, Sir, that I might still be able to write it in a note, and send it over by my groom to Stanton? There would be nothing disrespectful in that, would there, Sir?" said the young man, looking dreadfully terrified at the idea of what he had before him.

"Yes, certainly, Goldstable, you could send a note over to Stanton, and there would be nothing disrespectful in your doing so. But it would be nearly impossible that you should avoid seeing my brother afterwards," returned Walter, gravely. "Indeed you could not avoid calling upon him without great rudeness, and your embarrasment would only be increased by attempting to avoid it. No, no, my good fellow! you had better take the bull by the horns at once."

"Yes, certainly, Sir; I am sure you know best; and I would not, on any account, attempt to differ from you in opinion. Only don't you think yourself, Mr. Harrington, that the thing

might be much better done if you were to have the great kindness to see Dr. Harrington for me yourself?" replied the frightened boy.

"No, Lord Goldstable! that would not do at all," answered Walter, firmly, and almost with sternness. "You must yourself do that, which you will forgive me for reminding you that you promised you would do; and without that promise, I should never have been here. It is absolutely necessary that the withdrawal of the rash and hasty offer which you made to my niece should come from yourself; for it is so only that she will be considered as exonerated from all blame by her parents. My brother will be here to-morrow night, and on the following morning you had better go over to Stanton, and speak to him."

"So I will, Mr. Harrington, I will indeed," replied the penitent peer; "and I do assure you, that I never intended to shirk off doing it; I only thought that perhaps some little word from you might help me."

"Thus far I will help you," said Walter, good-naturedly interrupting him; "I will go over to Stanton with you, and will be present at

your interview with my brother, if you think that my doing so will be any support to you."

"Oh dear me, yes, Sir!" replied his greatly-comforted Lordship. "I should be so grateful —it would be everything! And then, you know, you could perhaps find an opportunity of expressing that you think I am not acting wrong. That would be a great help; at least, Sir, if you do not object to letting Dr. Harrington know that you think so."

"I seldom conceal my opinions on any subject," said the old man, with a smile; "and you may depend upon it, my Lord Goldstable, that the interview will not come to an end without my letting my brother know that you are, in my opinion, acting very uprightly."

"Oh then, my dear Mr. Walter Harrington, you are very, very kind to me! That is exactly what I should like to think about myself, and what I should like to make every body else think about me. The day after to-morrow, then, we will go over and call upon Dr. Harrington; and in less than half an hour, you know, it will be all over, and I shall feel all right again."

The silence of a minute or two which followed, seemed to indicate that Lord Goldstable was in a deeper reverie than was at all usual with him; but it was at length broken by his saying: "But tell me now, Mr. Harrington, will you? Do you think that, in speaking to the Doctor, it would be better or not to say anything about Mrs. Fitzjames?"

This was the first time that the poor young man had made any approach towards speaking to his venerable friend in a confidential manner on the subject of the widow, and Walter was not at all prepared for it. He remained silent and thoughtful, therefore, for a moment before he replied, and then he said:

"I should think not, Lord Goldstable. I should think it better, when speaking to my brother about his daughter, that you should confine yourself to that special subject; and I do not see how the lady whose name you have now mentioned can have anything to do with it."

"Why I thought," said his Lordship, colouring, "that perhaps Dr. Harrington, you know, would expect—that is, that he would be more

satisfied—I mean that it would seem more proper, you know, to give some good reason."

"Good reason for what?" said Walter, very greatly disposed to laugh.

"Why for my no longer wanting to marry Miss Harrington, you know. Won't he be apt to ask me why I have changed my mind?"

"I do not think that it is very likely; but even if he did ask such a question, I don't see why that should lead you to say anything about Mrs. Fitzjames."

"Why, good gracious, Mr. Harrington!" cried Lord Goldstable, "it seems to me that the most natural reason in the world for me to give for not marrying the one, is that I am immediately going to be married to the other."

"Your Lordship forgets," replied Walter, smiling, "that this is the first intimation I have received of any such purpose on the part of your Lordship. It certainly makes your change of purpose respecting Miss Harrington perfectly intelligible; nevertheless, if you will take my advice, you will not mention it to my brother."

"I shall certainly take your advice," replied

the puzzled-looking boy, "because I should always like to take your advice about everything. There is something in your face, in the look of your face, you know, when you speak to me, that makes me sure that you mean just what you say, and nothing else. And I don't know anybody in the world that I feel just the same about. But Dr. Harrington will be sure to ask me my reason, won't he? And if he does, what shall I say, my dear friend?"

"Why in that case," replied Walter, "I should tell him the simple truth. I should tell him that you had made this very improperly hasty proposal in obedience to the wishes of an aged relative, who ought to have known better, but that a little reflection had convinced you that it would be more for the happiness of both parties that this hasty offer should be withdrawn, and that you must trust to his kind consideration for your youth and inexperience for excuse and forgiveness for your rashness."

"Will you have the very great kindness to say all that over again, Mr. Harrington?" cried the delighted young nobleman, who had been greedily swallowing every syllable that Walter

uttered. "It is so exactly what I should like to say if I could only remember it!"

The old man slowly and deliberately repeated the words, and the young man slowly and deliberately repeated them after him; and when this was accomplished, Lord Goldstable rubbed his hands, nodded his head, and looked greatly comforted.

But now it was old Walter's turn to feel nervous and uncomfortable. He was conscious that, in order to induce the silly boy to undo the mischief he had done, he had led him on to a degree of intimacy which had produced a feeling of unlimited confidence on the part of the poor youth, whose abounding wealth and defective wisdom combined, were sure to make him the victim of the first wicked woman who got hold of him; and the ice being thus broken between them by the mention of Mrs. Fitzjames as his affianced wife, the old man felt that it was a positive duty to use the influence he was conscious of having obtained over him, by putting him on his guard.

"Make yourself easy, my dear Goldstable," he said, "about your interview with my

brother; it will be soon over, and you will never have any further trouble about that foolish blunder afterwards. But before I set off to look after my old housekeeper's proceedings at the Hall, I must say a friendly word or two about the announcement you have just made to me. I must say, that I am very sorry to hear that you are going to be married to Mrs. Fitzjames."

"Oh, dear me, Mr. Harrington, don't say that! I am quite positively sure that you would be very fond of her indeed, if you did but know her a little better."

Walter shook his head, but said nothing.

"I am quite sure that I know what you are thinking of—I am quite certain of it," said Lord Goldstable, looking earnestly in the face of the old man, which certainly wore a much graver expression than usual. "It is quite sure, and no mistake, that you are thinking that she is not rich enough for me. That's it, Mr. Harrington! I am as sure of it as that I stand here, because you look so grave. But my dear—dear Mr. Harrington, have I not got plenty of money already? I declare to you,

upon my word and honour, that I think I love her the better because she has not got much money, pretty, sweet, beautiful creature! Isn't she a beautiful creature, Mr. Harrington?"

"Yes, my dear young friend, she is a very pretty woman," replied Walter, who felt a good deal at a loss as to the best line of argument by which he could meet this incontrovertible fact.

"Well now, I am glad we agree upon that point!" returned the lover, triumphantly; "and about everything else you know, Mr. Harrington. I must be better able to judge of her than you are, for you do not know her at all, and I know her so very, very well! I do assure you that she is by far the most affectionate being that I ever knew in the whole course of my life, she is indeed, Mr. Harrington! I really think I should be in love with her for that, if it was for nothing else. Of course it could not be expected that I should love her quite so much if she was ugly, instead of handsome; but I am quite sure that I should love her a great deal, let her be as ugly as she would, if she only was as fond of me as she is now. Dear, darling, affectionate creature!"

"Tell me, my Lord, will you, has this lady any written promise of marriage from your Lordship, under your own hand?" said Walter.

"Oh dear me, yes, I believe so. Everything of that sort was settled between us long ago. And the settlements are all ordered to be written out by the lawyers, all regular; and I am to let her have five thousand pounds next week for her to go up to London to buy her wedding clothes. Shan't I like to draw that dear cheque, I wonder?"

Walter remained profoundly silent for a minute or two. The business seemed to be rather worse, or at least to be farther advanced, than he had supposed; but he had not forgotten his nephew's hint on the subject of the fair lady's friend, the tall Captain, who had been encountered when the whereabouts of poor Frank Caldwell had been considered a subject of sufficient importance to lead Henry Harrington to explore them in the places where the most industrious specimens of tall captains are to be found. He remembered this at the present moment with feelings of very friendly satisfaction, for the sake of the ardent young

lover, who was evidently intending to make him a convert to his own faith respecting the inestimable qualities of the lady whom it was the first wish of his heart to convert into Lady Goldstable, for without waiting for any answer from Walter, he burst out afresh with increased energy.

"But I say now, Mr. Harrington, just see how unfair you are about my angelic Sophia! Why should you say that you are sorry I am going to be married to her, when you can't possibly know anything about her, good or bad, excepting that she is so divinely beautiful, and the most affectionate creature on God's earth? Why then should you say, Mr. Harrington, that you are sorry I am going to marry her?"

Walter was not quite as well prepared to answer this question as he expected to be hereafter, and he felt puzzled how to evade it; but he was fortunately relieved from his embarrassment by the entrance of a servant with a note addressed to him, and which the man said had just been brought by a messenger from Doucham.

"More arrivals, my Lord!" exclaimed the old man, gaily, as soon as he had read the four

lines which the note contained. "I have not a great many English friends, but all the people I know seem to have given themselves rendezvous in this neighbourhood. This note is from an old lady who is a great favourite of mine, who begs to see me immediately at 'The George Inn,' at Doucham. I believe our breakfast is over, my Lord, so with your good leave I will set off at once."

"Who is it, Mr. Harrington? Do I know the lady? If she is a friend of yours, do pray invite her to come and dine at the Abbey to-day."

"Many thanks, my Lord," replied Walter; "but I do not think you know the lady. The note is from my friend Miss Hannah Wigginsville; and though she is neither more nor less than an old woman, and an old maid, I consider her as a very charming personage, and on this occasion she will, undoubtedly, entice me away from my duties at the old manor-house."

"I wish you would let me walk with you to Doucham," said Lord Goldstable, coaxingly. "I must call upon the ladies, you know, and

I should so like to walk with you, and talk a little more about my beautiful Sophia!"

Old Walter felt that the time was not yet arrived when any such talk could be turned to profit; he made up his mind, however, to become a patient listener upon a not very interesting theme, and they set off together for Doucham.

CHAPTER XIV.

At the entrance to the little town they separated; Lord Goldstable quickening his steps in one direction, in order to reach his love with as little delay as possible, and old Walter somewhat relaxing his pace in another, in order to give himself a minute or two to meditate upon what could have been likely to bring his friend Miss Hannah to Doucham, and what the particular business could be which had caused her to summon him to her presence.

His inquiry, on arriving at "The George," for a lady newly arrived from London, procured him immediate admission to Miss Wigginsville, and he found her installed in solitary state in

the best parlour of the little hotel, engaged in looking through the columns of the same newspaper which she had used the day before in London.

"Miss Hannah!" he exclaimed, cordially extending his hand to her as he entered; "I am delighted to see you! But what in the world has brought you into the country so suddenly? I cannot flatter myself that you have undertaken the journey solely because you knew that I should be glad to see you; and yet, as I learn by your note, you have sent for me as early as possible after your arrival. Can I be in any way useful to you? Few things could give me greater pleasure."

"The object of my journey, my dear Mr. Harrington, was to procure you, as I trust, a much greater pleasure than that of being merely useful to me. So now sit down, and you shall hear my story."

"I am all impatience, I promise you," said the old gentleman, drawing a chair close to her.

"I am a great respecter of proverbs, Mr. Walter. They have been very well called the wisdom of nations. But there is one, pithy

enough, which inculcates the minding business that concerns ourselves, in preference to all other, in the very teeth of which I have been acting, and am about to act. But I must trust to your good-nature to excuse me if it should turn out that I am only blundering, and really doing no good to anybody."

"I am quite sure that I may promise you my gratitude beforehand, if the business in question be business of mine," replied Walter. "I know your clever head, Miss Hannah; and that you are not likely to blunder."

"Well then, to come to the point at once," said she, "I must tell you that it has come to my knowledge that the high esteem in which you lately held Mr. Frank Caldwell has been much impaired."

Walter looked at her earnestly for a moment, and then said:

"Should you have the means, my dear Wigginsville, of convincing me that I have been wrong in thus changing my opinion of him, you will render me a greater service than you have perhaps any idea of."

Miss Hannah nodded her head rather mysteriously in reply; but there was an air of self-

satisfaction in her countenance and manner, which seemed to indicate that she knew a good deal.

"May I, as a mutual friend," said she, "ask the grounds of your altered opinion of Mr. Frank Caldwell?"

"As a mutual friend, and especially with the object you have in view, Miss Hannah, I will not scruple to tell you all that has come to my knowledge respecting him," returned Walter, with a heavy sigh. And he then recounted to her shortly, but distinctly, the result of his visit to Aylesbury Street, and of all Henry's subsequent inquiries.

Miss Hannah listened to the painful statement very eagerly, and her evident cheerfulness and contentment rose higher and higher as he went on.

"It is all right!" she triumphantly exclaimed, as soon as Walter had finished his statement.

"All right, Miss Wigginsville!" exclaimed Walter; "what can you mean, Madam?"

"I mean that I was right," she replied, rubbing her hands with an unmistakeable air of satisfaction.

"Then I have been very wrong!" returned Walter, looking deeply hurt. "I have most strangely misunderstood you, Miss Wigginsville; but I dare say the blunder was mine, and not yours. I was so anxious to hear what I wished, that I seem to have been incapable of comprehending the contrary."

"How can you comprehend, if you won't listen to me?" retorted the almost angry Miss Hannah. "What I meant by saying I was right, was this: at a party at our house, the other evening—"

But here Miss Hannah's narrative was cut short, by the sound of a loud voice from a person who had just sprung from a railroad omnibus.

"I say, you fellow," said the voice, "can any of you tell me where an old chap called Walter Harrington can be found?"

"If it is Squire Harrington, of Stanton Hall, that you are asking for in that queer way," replied another voice, which sounded very like that of a landlady, not particularly well pleased by the manner of a newly-arrived guest, "you have not far to seek, for Squire Harrington, of the Hall, is in that parlour?"

All this had been very distinctly heard by the Squire and Miss Hannah; and they were looking at each other with no little surprise, when the door of the parlour was thrown open, and in rushed our acquaintance, Dick Caldwell.

"Miss Wigginsville, by all that's fortunate!" cried the young man, bowing low to the lady. "Everything will be right now, I am quite sure!"

Walter stood with eyes wide opened, staring at him, and apparently struck dumb with astonishment. The whole style, air, manner, and address of the young man who stood before him were so totally unlike—not to say contrasted with—those of his young friend Frank, that he could not believe it to be him; yet so completely identical did they seem in feature and form, and even in voice, that it was not in his power to believe that it could be any other. In short, old Walter stood utterly confounded and amazed.

"You have arrived exactly at the right moment, Mr. Caldwell," said Miss Hannah. "If you had been a moment later, you would have lost hearing the extremely bad character I am going to bestow upon you."

"No! Are you really? Then I suspect, Miss Wigginsville, that we are both arrived here on the self-same errand? and if that is the case, I am most exceedingly obliged to you, Miss Wigginsville; I am, upon my soul! And since I have been so, beyond all expectation, lucky as to meet a friend here, perhaps you will have the kindness to present me to Mr. Walter Harrington?"

Walter's astonishment and mystification seemed to go on increasing with every word he heard. Miss Hannah, however, who, on the contrary, appeared to comprehend everything that was going on, immediately complied with the request made to her, and without a moment's delay, said very distinctly: "Mr. Harrington, permit me to introduce to you Mr. Richard Caldwell, the twin-brother of your friend, Mr. Frank Caldwell."

"The brother! The twin-brother!" ejaculated Walter, with vehement agitation. "Heaven and earth! Was there ever such a likeness! My darling child! My poor dear Kate! You must excuse me, if you please: I suppose I can get a post-chaise here? I understand

it all!—everything. And you, my dear, good Miss Wigginsville, have taken this journey on purpose to make me understand the desperate blunder into which I had fallen. God bless you for it, Miss Hannah!"

"Yet, what is Miss Wigginsville's self-sacrifice, compared to mine?" said Dick Caldwell, with an aspect half saucy, half sad. "She has made the journey to prove her friendship to a valued friend; and I have made the self-same, to prove satisfactorily to every one that I am a scamp!"

"At any rate, Sir, you have proved that you have a brother's heart for one to whom it is an honour to be kin. And for myself, I shall ever feel grateful to you for delivering me from an error, that was a most heavy grief to me."

"Then I have the satisfaction of understanding that all the fault you had to find with poor Frank, when you wrote him that thunderbolt of a letter, was that you mistook him for your humble servant?"

"Indeed, I very sincerely hope and believe that such is the case," replied Walter, with

a comic little bow. "Frank never was a gambler then, Mr. Caldwell?" added the old man, cheerfully.

"Never rattled a dice-box, or turned up a trump in his life," replied Dick.

"And he has never, under any circumstances, been in the habit of frequenting a hell in Aylesbury Street?"

"Never! And, upon my conscience, I do not believe that my brother Frank knows of the existence of any such place."

"Nor has any intimate acquaintance, then, with the set that assemble there?"

"Only with one, Mr. Harrington!—only with one. Frank is very intimate with me; and truth obliges me to say that he has always been very kind to me. But I hope you will forgive him for that, Mr. Harrington, on account of our being twins. And then, luckily for him, I have been very little in London, but almost always with my regiment; so that altogether, I do not think he can be much the worse for me."

"Then the person I saw on that memorable evening, in Aylesbury Street, was—"

"Myself, and no other!" interrupted Dick, eagerly. "And if I want to know your opinion of me, Mr. Harrington, I have only to turn to your letter to Frank."

"Nay, my dear Sir!" replied Walter, "had it not been for the position in which your brother was placed with respect to me and mine, I should not have expressed any opinion at all upon what I saw and heard there, however little it might be in accordance with my ideas of what is desirable."

"And for that matter, Mr. Harrington," replied the young man, dolorously shaking his head, "I believe my own ideas as to what is desirable, are not so very much different from yours—that is to say, as long as I am out of the way of temptation. But I am in a hurry to be off again by the next train, that I may have the pleasure of telling poor Frank that everything's right again. I suppose, Sir, I have your permission to say so?"

"My dear Mr. Caldwell!" said Walter, kindly, "you have done me a great service, and I would willingly requite it if I could. Let this comedy of errors turn out a happy

performance for all the parties concerned in it. I shall, of course, write to your brother Frank directly; and depend upon it, my letter will bring him here in a few hours. Stay with us, then, till he comes! And if we can keep you out of temptation thus long, who knows, but that among us, we may muster influence enough to keep you longer still? My old house will be ready in a day or two, to receive more friends than I shall be able, I fear, to collect together on so short a notice, and I shall greatly like to have you among them. But during this short interval, I am staying with a friend, who, I am quite sure, will gladly extend his hospitality to you. I cannot invite you, Miss Hannah, to any bachelor's house but my own," continued the old man, gaily turning to the delighted Miss Wigginsville; "but you must positively wait here till my house is ready for you, and then we will have *a gathering*. The Rectory, at Stanton, you know, is full of your friends, and you will be sure of having Kate here before long."

Nothing could be more cordial than the

acceptance of this proposal by the old lady, and the young gentleman. Lord Goldstable was summoned from "the Establishment," to ratify the promise of hospitality which had been made in his name; and though this summons withdrew him from a very tender love-scene, he behaved admirably well; and the radiant good-humour with which he welcomed his unexpected guest, and tried to make Miss Hannah promise to meet the very charming ladies who were coming to dine with him at the Abbey that day, confirmed his old friend Walter that he was well worth saving from the clutches of such a harpy as the beautiful Sophia; and even Miss Hannah herself, though she had registered more than one oath in Heaven, against holding communion with fools whenever it was in her power to avoid it, now caught herself promising, that though she could not come to dine with his Lordship on that particular day, yet that she should not forget his kind invitation, and should be very glad to accept it, if repeated upon any future occasion.

CHAPTER XV.

When Walter Harrington came down stairs on the following morning, to take his usual walk upon the fine terrace, which stretched along the whole extremity of the garden-front of the so-called Abbey, who should he find already parading there but Miss Hannah Wigginsville. She was walking backwards and forwards with a brisk step, and great appearance of enjoyment.

"How now, Miss Hannah!" exclaimed Walter, gaily. "Have you taken possession of my quarter-deck before me? I thought I was a tolerably early riser; but if you have walked over from Doucham this morning, you beat me hollow!"

"I thought I might have a chance of meeting you, if I walked towards the Abbey, Mr. Harrington; but as to lying late at Doucham, it is quite out of the question; for 'the Establishment' turns itself inside-out at five o'clock in the morning; and as it was impossible to sleep, I thought my best plan was to walk. What a fine rookery your young host has got here!"

"Glorious, Miss Hannah! And if he loves their well-tuned croaking as well as I do, he was lucky to find them here; for a rookery, Miss Hannah, is one of the things that neither king nor kaiser can command. The music of my busy collegiate old friends there would be vastly more difficult to bespeak than a new commemoration of a thousand performers at that other abbey, bright Westminster. It would be almost as easy to command a new comet as a new rookery."

"True, and most curious are the ways and habits of that queer society of antiquaries!" she replied.

"I suspect that there are some of our modern ways of going on that they do not altogether approve, for they certainly do not

colonize among us so freely as they used to do. But shame upon me, Miss Hannah, for thinking about an old colony of rooks, instead of a new colony of Christians. I have never once thought of wishing you joy, or asking how the wedding went off."

"There was no great novelty about it, Mr. Harrington. It went off just as such things always do go off; and the bride and bridegroom went off after it. I have allowed them three weeks to get through their billing and cooing; and I hope that will suffice them, and that we shall live in peace afterwards."

"Then, I presume, the plan is for the newly-married couple to live with you and Miss Jemima afterwards?"

"Why, where else could they live, Mr. Harrington?" returned Miss Hannah. "Mary Jane has nothing; and I fancy, there is but little chance of Mr. Garbel's finding her such a home as she has been used to, poor silly child."

"Then, I fear the marriage is rather an imprudent one," said the old gentleman, shaking his head.

"Of course it was," replied the old lady, briskly. "But what was I to do with Mary Jane? If I had kept her from marrying Mr. Garbel, she would have been sure to fall in love again directly with somebody else, whom I might have found more troublesome perhaps. We shall make him useful in the house, somehow or other; and I dare say it will all do very well."

"I am sure I hope so heartily! And now, my dear Miss Hannah, let me tell you once again, how deeply grateful I feel to you for what you did for us yesterday," said Walter, stopping short in his walk, and affectionately taking her hand. "Perhaps I have more happiness to thank you for than you are aware of."

"Not a bit of it, Mr. Harrington; I know all about it, I promise you. I know that there is a very dear creature, still more deeply interested in it than you are yourself," returned Miss Hannah.

"You were in Kate's confidence, then? I am not much surprised to hear it. But I wish you could have seen the sort of magical change which took place in her, upon listening to the

news I carried her after I left you yesterday. It really was the most touching thing I ever saw in my life."

"Dear, pretty, gentle Kate, I can fancy it!" said the stout-hearted Miss Hannah, quickly getting rid of a tear by means of blowing her nose, as if seized with a violent cold. "But here comes your young host, Mr. Harrington. What a good-natured looking boy he is. If I were you, I really would take a little trouble to keep him out of mischief. He might do so much good, you know."

"I think I shall keep him out of a little mischief, if I have tolerable luck," replied Walter.

The noble young host seemed perfectly delighted at seeing Miss Hannah, and listening to her commendations of his beautiful park; though he looked a good deal puzzled by a few cursory remarks which she made upon the change of church lands to lay, and the disadvantages of the mortmain tenure.

"I shouldn't wonder!" replied his Lordship. "I dare say you are right, very. But, I say, Mr. Harrington, I got a bit of news this

morning, and I want your advice about it. Since we eat our pleasant dinner at Bickley, the clergyman, poor old man, has died. He died that very night, I believe, or else the night after, poor old man! The living, you know, Mr. Harrington, is in my gift. They tell me it is worth above seven hundred a-year; and that beautiful house belongs to it—that sweet pretty place, commanding a view of the fall, and the ruins, you know, and all that pretty part that everybody admired so much. And Mrs. Fitzjames said, that it was just the spot that she should like to live in, with one dear companion that she could love, and be forgotten by all the rest of the world, because she was so fond of the roses that grew all over the house. She is such a dear, sweet, affectionate creature! But, nevertheless, I can't live there myself, you know; though I am sure I should like it excessively with her! But I can't, you know, Mr. Harrington, because I am not a clergyman. But I may have the pleasure of giving it to anybody who is. Who shall I give it to, Mr. Harrington?"

"Bickley always used to be reckoned the

most desirable piece of preferment in the whole neighbourhood," said Walter; "but the disposal of it ought to involve many serious considerations."

"What considerations?" demanded the church patron, with great simplicity.

"Considerations, as to how the appointment may be made most conducive to the welfare of the parish," replied Walter.

"And that I am sure I don't know; and I don't know how I am to find out," said Lord Goldstable, shaking his head.

"It is one of the instances so perpetually recurring, demonstrative of the evils of lame impropriations," said Miss Hannah, with more truth than politeness.

"Very true, Ma'am!" returned the impropriator, with a very hazy notion of what she meant, "I am quite sure it's true; but I did not appropriate it myself, you know, by my own act. And as it is mine to give away, the question is, who shall I give it to? And that is what I want you to tell me, Mr. Harrington."

"Look about you for a good, kind-hearted, active man," said Walter; "and if you make

these qualities your *sine quâ non*, you cannot go far wrong."

"Good, kind, active!" repeated Lord Goldstable, meditatively. "Good, kind, active!" he reiterated slowly. "I wish, with all my heart and soul, that I could give the living to Miss Cross!"

Not to laugh at this sally, was pretty nearly impossible; for the earnest sincerity of the accent in which it was uttered, rendered the drollery of it irresistible; but Walter speedily recovered his gravity, and said, with great sobriety: "I am afraid, my Lord, that livings have been often given upon less notable demonstrations of praiseworthy qualities than were demonstrated in Miss Olivia's courageous jump in Bickley cavern. But that is all you know of her, is it not?"

"No, Mr. Harrington, it is not," replied Lord Goldstable, stoutly. "When I was talking to her the pic-nic day, and offering her some *bon-bons*, and asking her if she would like another pic-nic, and all that sort of thing, she stopped me short in all my nonsense, to ask if I knew of a very, *very* poor family, that live almost close to the

park-gates on the farther side, you know, which is a good deal out of the way; and she told me that there was a wife and six children almost starving, because the father cannot work on account of being ill; and then she said, blushing like a full-blown rose all the time, that a little help in the way of food might save their lives. And she did not say a word that was not true; for I found that out the next day. Now I take it, Mr. Harrington, that Miss Cross is the sort of person that you would like me to put in the living?"

"I certainly think, that in many respects, the parish could not be in better hands," replied Walter. "But you know, my Lord, that although ladies certainly do preach sometimes, we never make parsons of them. We may have heard of a lady's being a priestess; but never of her being a clergywoman. I do not remember that they have ever aspired to any ecclesiastical preferment since the days of Pope Joan. Though more than one amongst them has contrived to draw captains and colonels pay in the other great militant profession."

"I declare, that in these days," said Miss

Hannah, "the spiritual seems the more militant of the two. Truly, it might be supposed, from the present state of things in England, that religion was the most pregnant apple of discord that had ever been thrown among mankind."

"Indeed we seem to make it so," returned Walter. "For instance, there is the young lady we have been talking of. She is really an excellent creature; but like the Lady Juliana Witherby, she is constantly ready to run a tilt against everybody who thinks differently in religious matters from herself."

"And on the same side as her Ladyship, is it not?" said Miss Hannah.

"Oh yes!" replied Walter, "she belongs to the Evangelicals, as they call themselves, and as they are also called curiously enough, by their opponents, although I presume the latter would not consent to denominate themselves 'anti-evangelists!'"

"I don't very well understand how Lady Juliana and James contrived to live in peace together," added Walter, after the silent meditation of a minute or two. "He, you know, is quite as violent in the opposite direction, as she is in her way."

"Perhaps they don't live in peace," suggested Miss Hannah. "I know, by my own experience with Mary Jane, that it is no very easy matter to live at peace with a low-church professor. I should like," she added, "to see something more of the other sect; I have never had any good opportunity of talking to a Puseyite."

"I can recommend my nephew James to you, Miss Hannah, as a fine specimen," returned Walter, laughing. "You may study the habits and peculiarities of the creature very advantageously in him."

"Dear me!" cried Lord Goldstable, who had for some minutes been seeking very earnestly in his thoughts for some proper and fitting candidate for his vacant living. "Dear me, Mr. Harrington! I wonder I should have never thought of it before! Why should I not give Bickley to your nephew, Mr. James? I dare say he would like it, because it is so pretty, you know; and it would be such a very great pleasure to me to offer anything agreeable to a relation of yours."

"You are very kind, my dear Lord," replied Walter, "and as to James's liking it, I fancy there would be no doubt about that. But it is

evident that you have no prejudices in your theology; for James, as we have been saying, is the exact antipodes of Miss Cross on all theological questions, and I confess that if I had a living to give away, I should prefer somebody of more moderate opinions than either."

"Dear me! It certainly seems to be a very difficult thing to do properly!" said the perplexed patron, with a deep sigh.

"May I presume to offer a suggestion on the subject?" said Miss Hannah, suddenly standing still, and preparing to indulge herself with a generous pinch of snuff.

"Pray do, Ma'am! I should really be so very much obliged to you, for I don't know any body in the world that I can think of."

"Then give the living to both the lady and the gentleman you have mentioned. From your park-gate anecdote of the lady, and from the general character of Mr. James Harrington, I am quite sure it would be very easy for your Lordship to do worse."

"I don't understand, I am afraid," said Lord Goldstable, with a puzzled air. "Livings can't be divided, I believe, can they, Sir?"

"Livings cannot be divided, my Lord Gold-

stable," returned Miss Hannah, with grave solemnity, "but gentlemen and ladies may be joined, you know."

"Bravo, Miss Hannah!" ejaculated Walter. "Why, what an admirable match-maker you are!"

"Capital, by Jove!" shouted the delighted young patron. "Thank you a thousand times over for your clever thought, Ma'am! You can't think how pleased I am about it, because of its being Mr. Harrington's nephew, and because, too, of my thinking her such a handsome girl, and so inclined to pity poor people. And then you know, Mr. Harrington, that they kept close together all the pic-nic day, and take my word for it that's a sign that they like one another. I understand something about that, don't I, Mr. Harrington? But now you must tell me," he continued, almost out of breath with his eagerness, "now you must tell me how I can explain to them what I want. What shall I say? I don't know the least in the world how to set about it!"

"Oh, there will be no difficulty about that, I should think," said Miss Hannah. "You have only just to mention to Mr. James Har-

rington that you greatly wish to make some provision for Miss Cross, as the daughter of a highly respected clergyman in your neighbourhood, who you understand is left but slenderly provided for; and that as you think you have perceived some symptoms of a mutual liking between him and the young lady, you would be happy to give the living of Bickley to him if you were right in your conjecture, and that a marriage were to take place between them."

"Capital, capital!" cried the delighted Lord Goldstable, clapping hands in a perfect ecstacy. "I am sure it will do! How very clever you must be, Miss Wigginsville, to think of all that off-hand, in a moment! Don't you think it will do, Mr. Harrington?"

"Yes, really, I think it may," replied Walter, "if James's romanising tenets about the celibacy of the clergy do not stand in the way of it."

"I don't think you will find it so," said Miss Hannah, indulging in another pinch of snuff. "Circumstances, Mr. Walter, have often, I believe, great influence in *modifying* principles."

"I certainly should not be greatly surprised if it proved so in the present instance," replied

the old man, with a grave and decorous smile, "and if so, I trust that our morning cogitations will turn to a happy issue."

"And that must begin by our all breakfasting together," said the young peer, offering his arm with a very good grace to the old lady. "I don't think I ever felt so happy about anything, but I owe it all to you, Miss Wigginsville!"

Miss Hannah very frankly declared that she was extremely hungry, and the well-pleased, though oddly assorted, trio turned gaily through an open window from the terrace into the breakfast-room.

CHAPTER XVI.

At precisely half-past six o'clock in the evening of the appointed day, a somewhat heavy, but very handsome travelling chariot, drawn by four post horses, drove up to the door of the Rectory at Stanton Parva. An old man-servant, carefully wrapped up, and a somewhat younger, and equally comfortable-looking abigail, occupied the rumble; two huge imperials formed the roof, but every inch of available space about the vehicle was occupied by well-contrived, and neatly-fitted cases and boxes of all sorts, sizes, and shapes. In the interior were the persons of the Rev. Dr. Harrington, and his high-born wife, the Lady Augusta.

A beautiful little silver sandwich-box, and a small flask for sherry (both empty), occupied the carriage-pocket on the Doctor's side, and a recently published volume of controversial theology (uncut), the pocket in front. A smelling-bottle and the paper of the morning flanked her Ladyship.

Great was the interest occasioned by the appearance of this equipage in the village street of Stanton. It drew a whole posse of idle boys in its train, who formed a gaping semi-circle, but at a respectful distance, as the dignified divine alighted. The first object which gratified the curiosity of this eager group was a foot incased in a very large cloth shoe, and a stout leg to match, buttoned up in a soft-looking gaiter This foot and leg as they were slowly and cautiously protruded from the carriage, were gazed at with great reverence. And next appeared a fat grey-gloved hand, grasping the uncut volume, and as the arm to which it belonged was immediately taken possession of, and supported by the ready arm of the old servant from the rumble, the remainder of the Doctor's person soon appeared, and by gentle degrees lowered itself, and was lowered

till it finally reached the level of the solid earth. The much-enduring divine made one or two faint signs of salutation to the awe-struck young crowd, and then stepped on towards the house with very much the air of a martyr walking to an *auto-da-fè*.

"Show me to my chamber, and let my son come to me!" he said, in a deep, hollow voice, as he entered the house.

The stairs were surmounted at length, with infinite apparent effort, and having reached the very comfortable-looking room that had been prepared for him, the Doctor sunk into a deep arm-chair, to all appearance very alarmingly overcome by the exertion he had made to reach it.

The Lady Augusta and her maid followed, accompanied by the Lady Juliana; and James immediately appeared, and having ushered them into the room, approached his father's chair.

"I fear, my dear Sir," said he, with very dutiful gentleness, "that the fatigue of the journey has been too much for you!"

The Doctor gave a slight, feeble wave of his

cambric handkerchief across his temples, and muttered, "In journeyings oft!" but he presently added, in a trembling but impressive tone, "James, if it will be more than twenty minutes before your dinner is served, I should be thankful for a glass of sherry! Nature is well-nigh exhausted!" Poor little Kate, who had not yet received a word from either parent, ran out of the room, and returned in a moment with the desired, cordial which she presented to her father.

The old gentleman swallowed it with the air of being exceedingly comforted thereby, and then returning the glass to her, laid his hand upon her head as she stooped to receive it, and said with great unction, "Thank you, my child."

"Dinner will be ready directly, dearest papa! and I am sure you must want it," said Kate.

A feeble and rather melancholy shake of the head was the only reply.

"Your father is a good deal tired, James," said Lady Augusta, "and to confess the truth, so am I. We have had a broiling sun the whole way. I should greatly prefer having some tea

here to going down to dinner, and if Juliana will kindly keep me company, we might have a snug chat together."

The dependant sister was far too well trained to make any objection to this proposition, though she certainly did feel, poor lady, that though she had been very busy she was not too tired to eat her dinner. She did not, however, allude to this difference in their respective sensations, but replied, in a most amiable manner, that she should like it of all things.

In a very few minutes the dinner was announced, and the Doctor and his two children placed themselves at table. James stood up stiffly in his place, and paused a moment in doubt whether he should venture to give the long, half-chaunted Latin grace with which he usually indulged himself; but the Doctor took the matter into his own hands, and settled it very shortly, by seizing upon the soup-ladle and mumbling out the words, "Thank God for all good gifts."

The son and daughter had the satisfaction of seeing their father recover rapidly under the genial influence of the repast; and after the cloth was removed, and that Kate had ran up

stairs to join her mother and aunt, the Doctor was sufficiently recruited to enable him to question James as to the present aspect of affairs between Lord Goldstable and Kate.

In reply to these inquiries, the Rector assured his father that, to the best of his knowledge and belief, everything was going on prosperously. "The great proof of this, my dear Sir, is, that my Uncle Walter is not only living in Lord Goldstable's house when he might easily have been accommodated either in his own or mine, but, moreover, they really appear to be more on the terms of a father and son than anything else. And as to Kate, so far from treating his Lordship with anything like coldness or repulsive formality, she seems as much at her ease with him as if they had been engaged for months."

"Enough, my dear James, enough!" replied the well-pleased father. "Your Uncle Walter has managed the whole affair most admirably! And now you shall let me sleep for a few minutes, James, my exhausted strength has need of it," and with these words he settled himself into his well-cushioned chair, and sunk into profound repose.

Kate, meanwhile, had found it rather a difficult task to keep the promise she had given her uncle, to leave to him the task of explaining her present situation, and yet not to answer her mother's questionings without more disingenuousness than she chose to be guilty of. Her mother had been prepared, however, to be very easily contented by the statement of Lady Juliana, which was, in fact, essentially the same as that given by James to his father, and led her to the same satisfactory conclusion; so that when at length Kate said, by way of putting an end to the discussion, that she believed it was Lord Goldstable's intention to come over to Stanton on the morrow, with her Uncle Walter, in order to speak to her father, Lady Augusta very graciously replied, "That is quite as it ought to be, my dear, and we will therefore say no more on the subject till after this interview is over."

Meanwhile, old Walter, after returning from the happy interview with Kate, which had left her too much comforted for any trifling amount of annoyance to be of much importance, retired to his own room at Brandon Abbey, and was anything but an idle man for the next hour or

two. In fact, he had a great deal upon his hands, and he was quite aware of it. Though he had hitherto lived with a marvellously strong feeling of indifference concerning the super-abundant wealth of which he was in possession, he began to think of it now with great complacency, and, moreover, he thanked the gods that all men were not as indifferent upon the subject as he had hitherto been himself; for if they were, he would not now be the influential personage that he felt himself to be.

He was far from being indifferent to the disappointment which he knew would fall upon his brother upon hearing Lord Goldstable's intended communication, and was most sincerely desirous of softening the blow as much as possible. But he knew it would be a difficult thing to convince his brother and his brother's wife, that it would be better for their daughter to marry a young lawyer with a few hundreds a-year, than a peer of the realm with many thousands. Yet this was the task before him.

He happened to know perfectly well, for Kate herself had told him so, that the only painful pecuniary anxiety which troubled his brother,

arose from the position of his eldest son. This by no means very bad, but decidedly greatly spoiled young man, had constantly resisted every attempt to make him adopt a profession; his chief argument for this being, that he might go into the army at any time. There can be no doubt that this would have been listened to very differently, both by his father and mother, had he *not* been the eldest nephew of a rich bachelor uncle. But old Walter had been but a very short time an inmate of his brother's house, before very grave doubts suggested themselves both to the Doctor and his wife, as to the certainty that their eldest son was to be his uncle's heir.

It was indeed quite evident that the old man was on an excellent friendly footing with the young one, but it was at least equally so that it was not Henry, but Kate, who was Uncle Walter's darling.

Many were the consultations which took place between the parents upon the probable good, or evil, that might arise from speaking upon the subject to Walter, but they both agreed that the experiment might endanger the pleasant and profitable way in which they were living together,

and, therefore, that at any rate it had better be postponed.

But greatly as they approved and admired the skill with which the venerable Squire of Stanton had contrived to ingratiate himself with Lord Goldstable, so as to ensure this splendid marriage for his darling niece, they both agreed that his conduct on this occasion gave the death-blow to their hopes for Henry; for there was no other way of accounting for the strangely close union that evidently existed between old Walter and the young nobleman, but by supposing that he considered Kate as his adopted daughter, and that she was to be portioned and dowered as such.

So completely, indeed, had they made up their minds to believe this, that the Doctor determined, with as little delay as possible, to consult with his brother upon the best means of at once persuading Henry to decide upon entering the army, thinking it not unlikely that he might do something liberal to help them in the way of purchase-money.

But in all these cogitations upon the feelings, the wishes, and the intentions of old Walter, the deeply-reasoning pair had never hit upon one particle of truth, excepting the pretty tolerably

evident fact that Kate was the old gentleman's darling. Not for any single moment had the idea of making her his heiress entered his head. He would as soon have thought of crowning her Queen of May or Empress of Germany. His common sense had pointed out his nephew Henry to him as his natural and proper heir; he had never dreamed of any other, and it was because he considered this as too obviously a matter of course to be doubted, that he had never thought it worth while to discuss the subject with anybody. If any additional reason for this silence had been wanted, he would have found it in his own averseness to the idea of being thanked for doing what he would have deemed it very wrong not to have done.

But the present state of affairs had produced a complete revolution in the mind of the old man respecting the arrangement of his large property, not, indeed, as respected the succession of Henry to the family acres, for it appeared to him that nature had made that arrangement for him, but concerning the rarely thought of, and never calculated amount of the large sum which had been accumulating during the many years that he had

been in possession of an income which he had never half spent, but which he knew his trusty agent, Mr. Tapley, had regularly invested in the English funds. The existence of this sum was now become a matter of great importance to him. Of the amount, or even of the existence of it at all, he knew that his brother was perfectly ignorant, and he flattered himself, not without good cause, that it might enable him to soothe his feelings under that disappointment which awaited him.

The exact result of the busy hour or two during which he was shut up with his writing-desk in his own room at Brandon Abbey, will be made manifest hereafter; but though an old, he was by no means a slow man, and he contrived to dismiss two important letters to the post before their late dinner-hour. The following morning he held a short conversation with his young host upon the subject of his Bickley living, and contrived to learn from him, with very satisfactory certainty, that he was very seriously determined upon disposing of it in the manner proposed by Miss Hannah, provided he could only find out that the pro-

posal would be agreeable both to the gentleman and lady.

"As to the lady, indeed," said Lord Goldstable, looking very intelligent, "I would bet ten to one I could answer for her. I am quite sure that she would not have jumped over to him in the way she did in the cavern, you know, Mr. Harrington, if she had not liked him. It would not have been natural, would it? But how shall we find out about the gentleman? I wish you would ask him. You would do it so much better than I could."

"Well then, I will ask him, if you commission me to do so," replied Walter, laughing. "It will make him stare a little I suppose, but it will not be the first time that I have produced that effect upon my nephew James."

"But when will you do it?" returned Lord Goldstable, earnestly. "How I do wish it could be done before I go over there, to call on Dr. Harrington."

"Well then, it shall be done first," said Walter, who perfectly understood the good feeling which suggested the wish. "I agree with you," he added, "that it will be better to

settle this matter before than after you have explained yourself to my brother."

"But when will you find time to do it?" persisted Lord Goldstable.

Walter meditated for a moment, and then replied:

"I will tell you, my Lord, how we will manage it. My brother and Lady Augusta are to arrive at the Rectory to-morrow evening; they are expected to dinner, and by Kate's account, her father will be too much tired to receive a visit from me that night; but you know my early ways, and that it will be easy for me to walk over in good time for their breakfast the next morning. This I will do, and will take care before the hour arrives at which your Lordship will make your promised visit, that your kind proposal shall be properly explained to James."

"Thank you a thousand times for all your kindness to me," returned the young peer, as cordially as if he had been returning thanks for the reception of a charming house and comfortable income, instead of being assisted in offering these good gifts to another; and after

the interval of a moment he added, with equal earnestness, though with less hilarity, "and don't fear, Mr. Harrington, that I should not keep my promise of calling upon the Doctor. I'll do it, you may depend upon it, if it should be the death of me."

CHAPTER XVII.

It had rarely happened during the course of Walter Harrington's long life that he had ever broken any promise, little or great, nor did he do so now.

He had no wish, however, to disturb the party at the Rectory, though it was his purpose to breakfast with them, and he therefore set off upon his pleasant walk across the fields, at what was to him rather a late hour, than an early one. But he had calculated his time very accurately, and reached the Parsonage, as he intended to do, exactly as the family were seating themselves round the breakfast-table. He found his brother happily recovered from

the fatigues of the previous day, one proof of which was, that he had already agreed at the very earnest request of his son James, to go with him into the church as soon as the breakfast was over.

"I am very glad, Uncle Walter," said the young Rector, that you are here too, that you may go into the church with us. As the Squire of the parish, my dear Sir, and as patron of the living, you know, you ought to know something more about our proceedings than you do at present. Don't you think so Sir?"

"I should like to know a great many things more than I do at present," replied Walter, "but I don't find the days long enough. At this particular moment," he added, "I have something very particular that I want to say to you, James. Can you not spare me a few minutes before we go into the church?"

"Impossible, my dear Sir," replied the unconscious James. "Do you not see that my father is already drawing on his gloves? If we do not go now we shall never get him into the church at all, and I am in great hopes he

may do something to help us about the repairs."

"Very well then, James, I must speak to you afterwards; only remember, will you, that I really have something important to say, and that I wish you to hear it before Lord Goldstable comes here to call on your father, and he will start to come here immediately after his breakfast, I believe."

James replied with an intelligent sort of look and nod, signifying that he already understood all about it, and that he knew as well as if he had been told a dozen times over, that this visit from Lord Goldstable was for the purpose of settling the preliminaries of Kate's approaching marriage with his Lordship.

But there was no time now for Walter to convey any intimation that the communication which he wished to make to James was of a more personal nature, for the Doctor was already advancing towards the house-door, and James, who considered the business he was upon as a very important one, was at his side in a moment.

A few slow and panting, but very dignified

steps, brought the Doctor, and those who had the honour of attending upon him, to the porch of the parish church. Having arrived there, he stopped a moment to recover his breath, and then turning to his brother, he said:

"You see how it is, Walter; James thinking, it seems, that I have not enough of duties and responsibilities on my shoulders already, insists upon my undertaking the office of amateur rural Dean in his parish."

"No, no, my dear Sir, I would not give you a moment of unnecessary trouble for the world. But I cannot help hoping that you will feel interested in my little embellishments. And it is such a lucky chance, having you and my uncle here together," said James.

The puffing and almost groaning dignitary perceiving that it was impossible to escape, struggled no farther, and the party entered the venerable little church, where they found the Rector's favourite churchwarden and carpenter, Mr. Brandling, waiting to receive them. This estimable personage had probably been desired by the Rector to explain to the Doctor what were the particular objects which they had in

view for the repair and embellishment of the sacred building, for it was to him, Mr. Brandling especially addressed himself.

"Our great object, Sir," said he, "has been to impart a mediæval air to our new work. This quatrefoil ornamentation is, I think I may venture to say, Sir, in the style of the best period."

"We have done the very little that our limited means permitted," joined in James, addressing himself chiefly to his uncle, "in as good taste as we could afford. But if you, my dear uncle, as Squire of the parish, and patron of the living, would help us, we might, perhaps, improve the religious feeling among us by removing these hideous penfolds of pews and re-seating the church with open benches in a becoming manner."

"Any good that I could do to the parish, I should be happy to perform," replied Walter. "But why do the parishioners want new seats, my good fellow? These seem to be in very good repair."

"Alas! my dear uncle, you do not appreciate the matter justly," replied James. "There

is a spiritual meaning, a symbolism, in all these things, Sir, that is very important."

"Why, begging your honour's pardon," said Mr. Brandling, following his superior on the same side, "what is a parcel of shabby Memel deals good for in a church? A fair range of low-backed oak benches, now, has a church spirit about them that is of the right sort, Sir."

"There is a church spirit in oak, is there?" said Walter, "and no spiritual meaning in Memel deals?"

"These things are more important than you think for," pleaded James; "and so I am sure my father will tell you," he added, turning to the Doctor, who had seated himself on a bench in the nave, and was wiping his brow with his handkerchief.

"Your father looks too much heated and exhausted to speak upon the subject just yet," said Walter, passing his arm under that of his nephew as he spoke; "and you shall come with me, James, just for two minutes, while he is resting himself:" and he then added, in a whisper, "I have something for your private

ear." These words, as they were intended to do, excited the curiosity of the Rector, and he therefore obeyed the impulse of the arm that had taken possession of him; but it was not without reluctance, for he had hoped much from this lucky encounter of his uncle and father in the church. The north side of the little building afforded a shady and a perfectly retired spot, and thither the mysterious old uncle led the somewhat impatient nephew. "James," he began, with a little more solemnity of manner than was usual with him, "James, you have, I believe, known Miss Cross for many years. I want you, honestly and frankly, to tell me your opinion of her."

"My opinion of Miss Cross, Sir?" returned the young man, colouring. "She is certainly a very fine young woman; and, as far as I know, she is a very good girl too—that is to say, that she is an excellent daughter, and though she is far from rich, she does a great deal of good among the poor people in all directions. But her religious opinions are so absurdly erroneous, that we are not always on such good terms as we should be if we thought alike.

However, my dear Sir, I am the last man in the world, you know, to pass judgment on a young lady; for my principles lead me very strongly to think that men of my profession would do well never to think of ladies at all."

"Really! are you so nearly a Romanist as that?" said Walter. "Then there can be no good done by my going on with what I was about to say. However, if I have awakened your curiosity, it will be hardly fair to leave it unsatisfied. The case is this James: my good-hearted young friend, Lord Goldstable, has, you know, the living of Bickley to dispose of. He has been telling me that he has heard Miss Cross spoken of as an excellent young woman, but not so well provided for as he thinks the daughter of so very respectable a clergyman as her father was, ought to be; and he has taken it into his head that he should like to give the living of Bickley to a young clergyman, about her own age, who might happen to like her, and whom she might happen to like. And to tell you the whole truth, James, it occurred to us both, that as you had been long neighbours and friends, it was not impossible that seven

hundred a-year, and a good house, might make a marriage desirable between you now, though it might have been very imprudent to have thought of such a thing before."

"And it is within distance, too," were the first words that James uttered.

To these words, however, his Uncle Walter made no reply, but continued to walk on beside him in silence. This silence was broken, after the interval of a few minutes by James, who said, in a very grave and rather reproachful accent:

"You are mistaken, Uncle Walter, in supposing that I am a Romanist. I am not. If I were, I should neither retain my present preferment, nor accept any other that could be offered me."

"Your explanation is perfectly satisfactory, James," replied the old man; "and it now only remains for you to tell me whether, in all other respects, the proposal of Lord Goldstable is agreeable to you."

"It would be very ungracious in me to say it was not," said the young man colouring; "and it would be even more than ungracious,

for it would be untrue. But it will not do, Uncle Walter, for me to accept this conditional offer without consulting the young lady as to her feelings concerning it."

"Very properly thought of," replied Walter, with an intelligent smile. "But somehow or other, James, I have a notion that the young lady will prove herself to be as tolerant and as reasonable as yourself."

"I am willing to hope so, Sir," said the Rector, very modestly; "and if you think you could excuse my absence to my father, I would wait upon Miss Cross immediately. Do you not think that it would be desirable that I should do so before I see Lord Goldstable? for it would be equally awkward, you know, either to thank him, or not to thank him."

"I agree with you perfectly, James," replied the old man, looking as grave as a judge. "Go at once, my dear nephew, and if your father inquires for you, I can very truly say that I have sent you on an errand."

"That you certainly may," returned the lover, with a hopeful smile; and gaily kissing his hand, without adding another word, he jumped

over the churchyard-stile, and was out of sight in a moment.

On re-entering the church, Walter found his brother looking exceedingly cross, and expressing a very strong persuasion that his son James must be out of his senses, to have dragged him into that cold vault of a church, and then to have left him.

"Let us walk home again in the sun," said Walter, "and that will effectually warm us. At any rate, you must not be angry with James, for it is I who have sent him off. I am the patron of his living, you know, and therefore he could not well refuse to do a little errand for me."

The pompous Doctor thought there was some joke a-foot, and he was not fond of jokes; but he felt upon this occasion, as he had done upon many others, that his brother had lived too long in wild and savage regions, to be at all aware of the respect that was due to a man who was a rector, a canon, and the head of a college, to say nothing as to his being the brother-in-law of an earl.

He condescended, however, to take the arm

of his daughter, who had dutifully stood beside him during the whole of Walter's important colloquy with James, and without deigning to take the slightest notice of the disappointed churchwarden, walked majestically out of the church.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Old Walter was too good-natured to follow him without first saying a few civil words to the discomfited Mr. Brandling, and the rustic artist was too much elated by this consolatory notice to let him escape, without first coaxing him into the examination of one or two morsels of his own very clever handiwork. This delay lasted so long, that Kate and her father had already entered the Parsonage when Walter left the church. He quickened his steps to follow them; but before he had advanced many yards beyond the churchyard, he was stopped by one of the men employed in the gardens at the Manor House, and informed him that two

gentlemen had arrived there, both of whom seemed very anxious to see him immediately.

"Already!" was the first word uttered by Walter, on receiving this intelligence; and "two?" was the second.

The more satisfactory reply of "go back, and say I am coming directly," followed; and having thus dismissed the messenger, the old man drew out his watch, and pondered over it for a moment before he set off to follow him.

"Poor Frank!" soliloquised Walter, still hesitating, as it seemed, as to what was first to be done. "He has come by the first train, instead of the second, as I calculated; and very natural that he should do so, though I did not guess it. Who the other is, Heaven knows!" And here, instead of following his gardener, he took a rapid stride or two in the contrary direction. "I have promised this terrified boy that I would be at his side when he made the speech which was to release my Kate, and I must not disappoint him. And yet to keep Frank Caldwell waiting at such a moment, is terrible!"

The dilemma was in truth not an easy one to escape from; and the very rare occurrence

of an impatient look on the noble brow of the old man seemed approaching, when the sight of Lord Goldstable, advancing with a tolerably quick step towards him, caused a sudden change both in his physiognomy and his plans.

"I am quite ready, Mr. Harrington," said the young peer, a little out of breath, and a good deal flushed. "I hope I am not behind my time. Just say it over to me once more, will you? I will do my very best, Mr. Harrington, not to mistake a word of it."

"I shall always consider your coming here to perform your promise, notwithstanding its being so disagreeable to you, as a proof both of your courage and your honour," returned Walter, shaking him very cordially by the hand. "But accident has befriended you, my dear Goldstable, and I must now consent to do what I refused before."

"Do you mean that you will say it for me, instead of my having to say it myself?" demanded Lord Goldstable, looking inexpressibly delighted.

"Yes, I do!" replied Walter. "The thing must be done directly for many reasons; and

yet it is impossible for me to go with you now to my brother, as I promised to do; and the best apology I can make for this breach of faith, is to undertake the task myself."

"Oh, thank you! thank you a thousand times!" returned the happy boy. "Then I suppose I may turn back again, mayn't I; and walk to Doucham, if I like it? Because, you know, it would not do for me to call upon the Doctor, if I have nothing to say."

"Oh no! certainly; it would not do for you to call upon him just now," said Walter. "I think I shall be able to manage better for you than that. One word more, my Lord, and then I must leave you, for I have a friend waiting for me at the Manor House: I think your Lordship will find no difficulty in arranging the partnership presentation to Bickley. James is with the lady at this moment, and I cannot say I have any doubt as to the result of their interview."

"That's capital!" cried the young patron, joyously clapping his hands. "Good-by, then —good-by! I shall see you at dinner."

"No, my dear Lord, I rather think not," replied Walter; "for I have a good deal of

business to do to-day. But there is a full moon, or something near it, and it is very likely that I shall walk over and take my coffee with you. But I must sleep to-night under my own roof, for I have invited company."

Lord Goldstable was about to utter a hospitable remonstrance, but Walter gaily waved his hand, and turned rapidly away, saying: "I must go now, but I shall see you again by-and-by."

And, in truth, it was but right that he should so hurry away; for there was one waiting for him who, as he well knew, could be in no very tranquil frame of mind; and to whom, moreover, he certainly owed the debt of a tranquil spirit, as most unquestionably he had been the means of depriving him of it. On entering his now comfortable-looking drawing-room, at the Manor House, he found, as the gardener had announced, two gentlemen waiting for him. The one was indeed Frank Caldwell, whom he had certainly expected to find there; the other was his old friend and agent, Mr. Tapley, whom he certainly did not expect to find there. Had this first meeting between Frank Caldwell, and his penitent friend, Walter,

been *tête-à-tête*, the atonement and the acceptance of it might have been more explicit—but it could not have been better understood; and the grasp of the old man's hand, and the cordial pressure with which both of Frank's received it, sufficed to satisfy them both that no misunderstanding of any kind any longer existed between them.

And then Walter turned to the lawyer, and paid him a compliment but rarely offered to gentlemen of his profession, for his first words were: "My dear Tapley, I am delighted to see you; but I had no notion that you could have been ready so soon. Have you really brought the papers with you?"

"Yes, really, Mr. Harrington," replied the lawyer. "The business was very simple, Sir. But I will not pretend to say that it would have been quite so rapidly accomplished, had it not happened, by an odd chance, that we have another piece of business to execute in this neighbourhood, and it was as well, you know, to kill two birds with one stone. Are you in the commission, Mr. Harrington?"

"Not I, Tapley! I have been too much an absentee to have meddled with anything

of the sort," replied Walter. "But what is the matter in hand?"

The lawyer drew the old gentleman into the recess of a window before he answered him, and then he said: "This it is, Mr. Harrington. There is a certain fellow called Captain Fowler, who is rather an illustrious member of the company of scamps, and we have an unfortunate client who has already been victimised by him, and who is in danger of being more victimised by him still. But though we know all this, we have great difficulty in getting him within the grasp of the law. At last, however, our sharp scamp has so far forgotten what he was about, as to allow the said victim to supply the stamp on a promissory note, which he has been done out of, and we shall trounce him, if we can catch him, on the charge of stealing a stamp. We have learnt that he is lying snug at Doucham. I have a warrant against him all in order, and I want to find a local magistrate by whom it can be backed."

Had no such name as that of Captain Fowler occurred in this statement, it is probable that Walter would not, at that moment,

have listened to it with quite so much interest; but he immediately recollected the passage in his nephew Henry's letter, respecting the reputed connexion between a Captain Fowler, of rather worse than doubtful respectability, and the very dangerous enslaver of his really well-beloved *protégé*, Lord Goldstable.

It immediately struck him that this coincidence might be turned to good account. Having satisfied the lawyer as to the facility of finding a magistrate, he begged him to do nothing in the business for the next half-hour, the reason for which he would explain to him, as soon as he had exchanged a few words with the friend who had arrived by the same train with him.

"I have considerably more than half an hour's work to do, Mr. Harrington, before I can profit by the information, so do not hurry yourself. I have a clerk, who, I suppose, is waiting for orders in your servants' hall. In truth, more than one of our young men were up all night, working upon your papers, in order to enable me to set off from London this morning; and you will do me a favour if you can admit us into a room where we can

put the finishing stroke to what we have been about.

This request was immediately complied with, and then, at length, Walter and his young friend Caldwell found themselves at leisure, and at liberty to talk over all that had passed during the eventful period which had elapsed since they last parted.

On the subject of the terrible mistake which had been made by Walter and his nephew in Aylesbury Street, Frank would not hear a word of apology, declaring, and with all sincerity, that they had in this acted exactly as they ought to have done.

"Nor, fearfully as I have suffered," he continued, "can I find room in my heart for anything but rejoicing at the speedy termination of an error, which, if it had lasted much longer, would, I believe, have made me fly my country."

"I am quite willing to take your view of the case, my dear fellow," replied the old man. "There can be no wisdom in mourning over sorrows that are past, and I flatter myself I shall be able to atone for what my blunder made you suffer by smoothing some of the

difficulties which were in your way before I committed it."

"And when may I—" said Frank, beginning a speech in rather a plaintive tone of voice.

"You need not go on, Frank, I perfectly well know what you are going to say, and the only answer I can give must be summed up in the one word *patience*. I cannot possibly arrange any scheme for your seeing Kate, till I have seen what my influence can achieve with my brother and his wife towards obtaining their sanction for the interview. And during this not very agreeable interval, I really have nothing better to propose to you than that you should first take some luncheon, and then set out upon a ramble for an hour or so under those fine trees yonder in the park."

"Yes, I will wander in your park till you summon me to your presence again; but I can dispense with your hospitable offer of luncheon," replied Frank, in an accent that was by no means particularly gay. And then drawing out his watch, he said, "It now wants ten minutes to one, Mr. Harrington, may I return to the house at two?"

"No, Frank," replied Walter, laughing, for

if my old housekeeper should happen to see you looking as you do now, I should not be the least surprised if she sent off an express for the apothecary. No, it will be better for me to come to you, my good fellow. I will look for you under that avenue yonder, and trust me I will waste no time in the interval."

And so they parted.

Considering that old Walter had all his life been more of a wanderer than a housekeeper, he had really managed matters very cleverly; for not only was his own room ready for him, but sundry other things, and sundry other rooms were ready beside. About five of his very precious minutes were all that he now found necessary to bestow upon the principal and prime minister of all his domestic manœuvrings.

"Well, Margery, everything goes right, I hope? Cook arrived? Rooms ready? And all things prepared according to order?"

"Everything, Sir," replied the old woman, in a tone of very satisfactory confidence.

"And if I shall have a dozen people to breakfast with me the day after to-morrow, you

really think you could manage to find cups and saucers, and something to eat?"

"I wish, Sir, you could find time to look into the china closet," she replied; "and with Doucham so near, there is no great danger of wanting anything to eat."

"That's well, Margery. I can't look at the china closet now, because I am in a hurry, but I will bring Miss Kate with me to look at it to-morrow may be."

And so saying, Walter set off on his rather important visit to the Rectory.

CHAPTER XIX.

On entering the little drawing-room at the Rectory, Walter found his brother slowly recovering from the immense fatigue of having walked to the church and back again, and the three ladies seated at a work-table at no great distance from his arm-chair. The presence of the Lady Augusta he considered as very decidedly desirable, but not so that of her sister; and as to Kate's being present at a discussion so deeply interesting to her, he considered it as being more objectionable still. While pondering on the best way of dismissing these superfluous auditors, James entered the room through the open window. Walter per-

ceived at the first glance that the now gay-looking young Puseyite was speedily to become the Rector of Bickley, and the husband of Miss Olivia Cross. There was no doubt about the matter; Walter read the whole thing as distinctly as if it had been placarded on a board before him in letters of a foot long.

Nothing but his indulgent pity for the impatience of poor Frank Caldwell, had prevented Walter from delaying his interview with his brother till the result of James's visit to Miss Cross had been made known to him, and he hailed his timely arrival as a good omen.

"Let me speak to you for a moment, James," said he, suddenly rising and leading his nephew back again through the window by which he had entered. "I think I may safely wish you joy, James, both of the living and the lady," said he. "It is not so?"

"You may, my dear uncle; I flatter myself that it will not be very long before I possess both."

"Your interest with the lady was decidedly your own," said Walter, "but I think my interest with Lord Goldstable may have been

useful to you; and all I ask in return, my dear James, is that you should give me your vote and interest upon a matter which touches me very nearly, and in which both your father and mother have great influence. The first thing, however, that I want you to do for me, is to get Lady Juliana and your sister Kate out of the room. When you have achieved this, I shall wish you to return to it. You will have no objection, I presume, that, among other matters, I should inform your father and mother of Lord Goldstable's intentions in your favour?"

"On the contrary, my dear Sir, I should wish them to know it immediately—and of my intended marriage also."

"Very well, James, I will announce both," replied his uncle.

"And I will get my aunt and sister out of the way. Which I shall do by taking them into the dining-room, and telling them that they must not return to the drawing-room till I summon them," said James. "No measure less peremptory," he added, "would suffice to secure you from the intrusion of my aunt."

This decisive manœuvre, however, was suc-

cessful, and old Walter found himself at liberty to begin his very delicate negotiation with the assurance that the banished ladies should not break in upon him. He was not an adept at long speeches, nor was it his intention to say more than was necessary on the present occasion. It was to his brother that he addressed himself.

"I am come to you, brother," said he, "with a message from Lord Goldstable."

"I thought that Lord Goldstable would have been here himself this morning," said Lady Augusta.

"It is my fault if he has not done so, Lady Augusta," replied Walter. "He certainly was coming here, not merely to make an idle call of ceremony, but to enter upon an important explanation."

"It was something of that kind that we were certainly expecting," returned her Ladyship, with a very gracious smile; "but his being so evidently a favourite, and a friend of yours, Mr. Harrington, has sufficed to convince us that the delay of this explanation has arisen from accident, and not from anything dishonourable on his part."

"The boy appears to me to be a very well disposed good-hearted boy, and I see nothing dishonourable about him, poor fellow. Unfortunately for him, however, his only near relation, I mean Lady de Paddington, is not a person who can be spoken of so favourably; on the contrary, I believe her to have acted towards this poor young man in a manner highly dishonourable. For personal reasons of her own, which you may perhaps understand better than I do, she took it into her scheming head that it would be advantageous for her to arrange a marriage between him and your daughter, and he was simple enough to comply with her wishes, and to propose to your daughter in the abrupt and unauthorized manner that he did. Nothing but his profound ignorance, and singular simplicity of character could have rendered this possible; and I am now come to offer every possible apology on his part for having addressed himself to Kate in a manner so offensively presumptuous."

There might be seen on the countenances of both the Doctor and his lady, as they listened to this speech, a mixture of anger and uncertainty, of hope and of fear, that very nearly

approached the comic. But Walter Harrington never quizzed anybody; he was too single-minded, and too kindly tempered for it. He knew perfectly well upon the present occasion he was giving pain, and he only wished to make the necessary endurance of it as short as possible; he therefore waited for no reply, but hastened to say with a very pleasant smile:

"I flatter myself, however, that you will soon look upon this foolish affair in the same light that I do. It is like most things of a mixed nature. It is, beyond doubt, disagreeable to us all that our dear Kate should have been addressed in so idle and offensive a manner; but, on the other hand, the kindness of Lord Goldstable to James—"

The Doctor had up to this point been silent, partly from dismay, and partly from wanting breath to express the indignation he felt, both at the conduct of Lord Goldstable, and at his brother's manner of treating it; but now, in a voice of ill-restrained anger, he said:

"Whatever may be the nature of the intelligence which you have to communicate, brother Walter, it must be desirable that you should make it intelligible. I only look for this. I

look not for any sympathy on your part. It is only too clear that I should look in vain. Do you mean to tell us that Lord Goldstable withdraws his proposal of marriage to Miss Harrington?"

"Yes, certainly, I mean to tell you so, my dear Henry," replied Walter. "What else?"

"It is impossible! absolutely and totally impossible!" ejaculated Lady Augusta, with great warmth. "I do not and cannot believe that you would permit yourself to be made the deliverer of such a message, and still less that you should deliver it as if it were praiseworthy instead of infamous!"

For half a moment Walter looked a little angry, and he might have felt and looked so a little longer still, had it not been for the consciousness that he came there to confer very important benefits upon his brother's family; the remembrance of this soothed him in a moment.

"We certainly do not look upon this affair exactly in the same light, Lady Augusta," said he. "The offensive part of this young Lord's behaviour was, according to my judgment, the

presuming to address my niece in the sudden and unauthorized manner he was so ill-advised as to do. His sorrow for this, and his apology so frankly and honourably expressed, does him, in my opinion, great honour; and I sincerely hope that some ten or a dozen years hence his education may be sufficiently advanced, and his character sufficiently formed, to justify his offering his hand and coronet to an estimable woman, though no additional number of years can ever make him a suitable match for such a being as your admirable daughter. But though truth obliges me to confess that I do not contemplate the possibility of his ever becoming a suitable companion for such a person as Kate, I am very far from thinking lowly of Lord Goldstable's character. There is much, very much, that is estimable and amiable in it, and I will tell you one anecdote that tends to prove this. He has heard, from more quarters than one, that Miss Cross, the daughter of our old acquaintance, formerly Curate of Bickley, is but very slenderly provided for, and also that she has the reputation of being, notwithstanding her poverty, very actively kind and useful to the poor people round her. These two facts

together put it into his good-natured head that he should very much like to see Miss Cross in the character of the Rector's wife at Bickley; and having seen, or fancied, that James and the young lady appeared to like each other, he has determined upon giving the living of Bickley to my nephew, provided only that he will marry Miss Cross."

"He will give the living of Bickley to James?" said the Doctor, in a tone of great solemnity. "It is a noble piece of preferment, brother Walter, and the house might be coveted as a residence by a man of two or three thousand a-year. Moreover, it is within distance of Stanton Parva. It would be a most desirable thing for him, indeed!"

"Desirable! It would make him richer than his elder brother is ever likely to be!" exclaimed Lady Augusta, with considerable agitation. "But Juliana assured me that James will never marry. She has told me more than once, since we have been here, that he holds celibacy to be the duty of a priest, as he chooses to call himself. It really," she added, with her hands clasped, and her eyes raised to Heaven, "it really will be too hard to

bear if he too, as well as Kate, chooses to consider himself as too much above the world to be fit to live in it."

"I do not believe that James will make any objection to the condition annexed to this offered preferment," said Walter, with very encouraging confidence.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Lady Augusta, who evidently listened to this opinion with very perfect faith in its being well-founded. "I confess that such a provision for my son will be a great consolation to me," she added. "I own I have suffered dreadfully from seeing a child of mine living with two maids and a man, all looking, too, as if they come out of the hay-field, and a one-horse dog-cart as his only equipage! His income, with the house and garden fairly valued, will be equal to fifteen hundred a-year. This is a great comfort, certainly!"

"It is a pleasure to me to hear you say so," said Walter, kindly; "and by way of making you feel reconciled to his marrying a young lady who brings nothing that can be settled upon herself and her children, I will myself settle five thousand pounds on Miss Cross, the

income to become hers immediately; at least I will do so upon one condition—namely, that your Ladyship will yourself have the kindness to make her a visit, and will announce this my intention to her and her mother."

Lady Augusta was silent for a moment, but then she said:

"Very well, Sir, I accept the condition. I flatter myself I am too good a mother to stand upon trifles. I am very glad, I must say, that I shall never again see James living in the style he does now. It is really heart-breaking! There is only one drawback to the pleasure of knowing that it is over, and that is poor Henry! Poor dear fellow! I am sure I heartily wish that he had been brought up to the church!"

The Doctor here shook his head and groaned.

"There is no good, Dr. Harrington, in making ourselves miserable about it. We must trust to Providence!" said Lady Augusta, in a tone of the deepest melancholy.

"And Providence certainly seems to have provided for him," said Walter, laughing, "for my being a bachelor, you know, is clearly providential."

On hearing these words, the Doctor looked at

Lady Augusta, and Lady Augusta looked at the Doctor. It was the first time that Walter had ever alluded either to his being a bachelor or to the future prospects of his eldest nephew, for it was only of late that he had become aware that Henry's succeeding him in the Stanton property was not in their estimation as much a matter of course as it certainly was in his own. It is probable that had there been no difficulties in the way of his dear Kate's marrying the man she loved, this uncertainty respecting Henry's future would have been removed as soon as it was discovered. But the old naturalist had not studied the propensities of all animals so very perseveringly as he had done, without giving some little attention to the *genus homo* among the rest; and this had given him a sufficiently comprehensive view of the varieties to be found therein, to suggest the idea that they, too, as well as all other creatures, might be managed by attention to their peculiar propensities; and it was for this reason that he had proceeded very differently from what he would have done had no difficulties stood in the way of Kate's union with Frank Caldwell. As it was, however, he felt no scruple in profiting for

her sake, from the power that was vested in him. And with this view, he harangued his dignified brother and his noble sister-in-law, as follows:

"It is a great pleasure to me, dear Henry, to see how cordially both you and Lady Augusta seem to approve the arrangements I have been so fortunate as to assist in respecting James; and this encourages me to go on in my plottings and plannings about your other children. Rich old bachelor uncles are likely, I should think, to be busybodies; and if they do not dispose of their wealth in any very outrageous wicked way, I suppose they are generally forgiven for being so. We all seem very well satisfied about your son James, and I hope and trust that my projects concerning Henry and Kate will be equally successful. But I must tell you fairly, that what I propose to do for Henry, will not be done unless I have your consent and approbation as to what I intend to do for Kate. I believe that you all know that I am fond of Kate. I suppose I am what is generally called partial to her, and this being the case, it is but natural that I should wish to make her happy—that is, according to her own notions of happiness. Now I happen to know that she has no idea and no hope that

she ever can be happy unless she marries my young friend Frank Caldwell."

On hearing these words, the Doctor started so vehemently that he almost jumped out of his chair, and Lady Augusta clasped her hands, closed her eyes, and looked very much as if she were going to burst into tears.

"I am sorry to see you both so painfully affected by what I have said; but pray bear with me while I explain to you what I wish to do in the way of providing for your children, and also the conditions upon which it will be done. I am quite aware that my ideas of what may be best for Kate may differ very widely from yours, and this perhaps may be accounted for by the very different manner in which we have passed our lives, and this difference may very naturally appear to you to be a great misfortune; but then, on the other hand, you should remember that if my past manner of life had not been thus different, I should not now be the rich man I am, nor would your children be my most obvious heirs. I dare say I shall surprise you both when I tell you the amount of the property that has accumulated in the funds. I certainly was surprised at hearing it myself. Tapley tells

me that I am worth above eighty thousand pounds! independent of the Stanton estate."

"Eighty thousand pounds!" exclaimed both his auditors at once.

"Yes, even so; and you may depend upon it that his statement is correct. I certainly was not aware how rapidly the money was rolling up, for I never refused to indulge myself with any reasonable acquisition. But I rather suspect that the living without any establishment makes a great difference in the expenditure of money. But whatever the cause, you may safely receive the fact to be as I state it. Besides the estate in this parish, I have above eighty thousand pounds at my disposal. Now, in my judgment, your daughter Kate has already a very sufficient fortune, and if she had happened to fall in love with a rich young man instead of a poor one, I should probably have left my eighty thousand pounds to some scientific institution. As it is, however, I propose to settle the whole sum upon her and Frank Caldwell, jointly, and upon their heirs after them. But I know Kate well enough to be quite certain that my doing this would not suffice to render her marriage with Frank Caldwell possible. She never will marry him as

long as you live, unless you both sanction the marriage by your consent. And this brings me to the question about Henry. If you both of you freely and graciously consent to the immediate marriage of Kate to Frank Caldwell, I *immediately* make over the Manor House, and all that is in it, together with the whole property appertaining thereto, to my well-beloved nephew Henry. Now, then, brother and sister, I await your answer."

It was quite impossible to doubt for a moment as to what that answer would be. Both the Doctor and his lady looked very much as if they felt disposed to fall at his feet; but as the expression of this abounding delight and gratitude in any way would have been very decidedly the reverse of pleasant to the old man, he suddenly started up, exclaiming, in a tone which showed his satisfaction to be fully equal to their own: "Now, then, everything is right between us, and as a proof of this you must promise to breakfast with me—that is to say, you must all promise to breakfast at the old Manor House, at ten o'clock the day after to-morrow."

This promise was promptly given by the

startled, astonished, but certainly much delighted parents; and when old Walter added, as he left the room:

"Now then, I shall go into the dining-room, where I deposited Kate, while I settled all this business with you, and tell her to prepare herself for a visit from Frank Caldwell."

When he added these very decisive words, the only answer he received was a gracious smile, and a still more gracious nod of approbation, from both the dignified father and the noble mother of Frank Caldwell's affianced, but still unconscious bride.

It was but a short whisper, however, that he bestowed upon her, ere he started off with the activity of five-and-twenty to release Frank from his miserably-anxious, tread-mill sort of exercise in the avenue. But short as the whisper was, it sufficed; and having told the Lady Juliana that her sister wished to see her in the drawing-room, Walter had the satisfaction of leaving his darling in no very painful frame of mind, though he ordered her to remain a prisoner where she was till he returned to her.

How she bore this sudden change in the

aspect of her affairs, the old man had no means of judging, for he only escorted his friend Frank to the door of the Rectory dining-room, which he opened for him to pass through, without even looking in to see if she were dead or alive.

CHAPTER XX.

Mr. Tapley was not the only individual among our *dramatis personæ* who had good and sufficient reason to know that Captain Fowler was, as the attorney had expressed it, "lying snug" within the limits of the town of Doucham. It was only the day before the arrival of Mr. Tapley at the Manor House, that a note had been mysteriously conveyed to the unfortunate Mrs. Fitzjames, informing her of this most unwelcome fact, and very peremptorily requiring her immediate presence at an obscure waggoner's inn, situated in the outskirts of the little town. Mrs. Fitzjames, notwithstanding her beauty, is

not a person likely to excite much sympathy, either with her sorrows or her joys, but the excess of her dismay and horror at receiving this terrible summons was pitiable.

Her first wild thought was, that she would take no notice of it, leaving him to suppose that it had failed to find her. But a very few moments of meditation upon this scheme sufficed to convince her that it could not avail to prevent their meeting, and would only tend to exasperate his brutal temper. No, go she must, and go she did.

The style of the interview between them, as well as its aim, may be easily imagined. His immediate object, or at least his immediate demand, was a personal introduction to Lord Goldstable.

"Let me once be enabled to claim acquaintance with him," said the ruffian, with a tremendous oath, "and I'll soon get all I want out of him. If I don't squeeze him as you squeeze an orange, I'll never ask you to help me more."

"Fear not, Fowler, that you shall not become acquainted with him. You know as well as I do, that there is no danger of that," replied the

terrified beauty; "but for Heaven's sake," she very reasonably continued, "do not be so mad as to attempt this, before I am actually his wife!"

"And what is to become of me, Madam, in the interval? Your hundreds are gone to the devil, and if I don't intend to go after them, I must have more. What have you done with the other half of that money? Let me have it, and I'll let you wait a little longer before I make acquaintance with him. Why don't you answer me? What have you done with that money?"

"What have I done with it?" she exclaimed, vehemently. "I have spent it, Sir. I was over head and ears in debt when I got it from him, and I knew that I should be stopped as I left the house if I did not pay!"

"Then at this moment you have positively no money to give me?" said Fowler, with a threatening scowl.

"Not a shilling!" was her reply.

"And you refuse to introduce me to him?"

"Only till the important knot is tied," she replied. "He is quite as much in a hurry for it as I can be, and when I am once his wife,

you know perfectly well that whatever I have, you will share."

He looked at her in silence for a moment, and then replied:

"That may be, or it may not be, Madam Sophy. But I know a fact which is considerably more free from doubt. I must have money, woman! and that immediately. Now I think I know a way by which I can get money out of him, without your becoming his wife: namely, my dear Mrs. Fowler, by saving him from ever becoming your husband. This would be a service worth paying for, and I will contrive to make him aware of this. This scheme will suit me better than the other, for this plain reason: the marriage may take many days to accomplish —my scheme can be accomplished in one!"

The beautiful complexion of Mrs. Fitzjames suffered materially as she listened to this, for she turned as pale as death. Again he looked at her for a little while in silence, and then he said:

"There is one way, and but one, by which you can prevent me from immediately putting this scheme in practice."

" Speak it!" said the trembling Sophia, in rather a hoarse whisper.

" You are still, by your own account," he said, " on the very tenderest terms with him. If this be so, there can be little or no difficulty in coaxing him out of a little more money. You can call it a loan, if you will. Tell him some cock-and-a-bull story about your income having been accidentally delayed. Do it how you will —but do it successfully, or prepare yourself to abide the result!"

" How much time, how many days will you allow me?" said she.

" One day is as good as a thousand for such a business," he replied.

" No, no, you are mistaken," said she eagerly, and with very evident sincerity, " I must have longer. I must pretend to receive a letter, and then to be very miserable; and then, at last, when he is begging and praying that I will tell him what is the matter, I must let him know, with a great deal of reluctance and delicacy, what is the cause of my distress."

" Bravo, Sophy! That's your sort, my dear. And as a reward for your clever scheme, I will

grant you the delay of three days—but not an hour longer, remember!"

And so they parted, the gentleman promising to keep out of sight for these stipulated three days, and then to take himself off till the hoped-for marriage was accomplished, on condition that she contrived to obtain, at the least, two hundred pounds to pay his travelling expenses.

Walter, meanwhile, had transacted a great deal of very interesting domestic business; for not only had he arranged with Kate and old Margery, that a very handsome breakfast was to be procured, *coûte qui coûte*, at the Manor House, but he had also obtained the promise of all the guests whom he wished to be present at it, that they would all favour him with their company on the appointed morning, precisely at ten o'clock. The party was to consist of the present family circle assembled at the Rectory—of Mrs. Cross and her daughter Olivia, of Lord Goldstable and Dick Caldwell, who was still staying with him; together with Lady de Paddington and Mrs. Fitzjames and Miss Hannah Wigginsville. Moreover, in addition to these, old Walter had no less than three gentlemen

staying in his house, not to mention an old friend and neighbour of his, a county magistrate, who happened to have made him a visit that morning upon particular business, so that the party altogether amounted to no less than fifteen persons; but, nevertheless, and greatly to the honour of Kate and old Margery must it be said, everything was in the highest order, and the table as handsomely spread as if the old Squire had been giving *fêtes* there unceasingly for the last forty years, instead of having passed that interval in wandering over the earth for his amusement.

The reader, being perfectly well acquainted with the motives and feelings which were likely to influence the arrangements that took place among the company when the gentlemen were requested by old Walter to hand the ladies from the drawing-room to the dining-room, need scarcely be told that Lord Goldstable gave his arm to the radiant and triumphant-looking Mrs. Fitzjames, or that Frank took care of Kate, and James of Olivia. Neither can it be necessary to mention that Lady de Paddington kept as far from Lady Augusta as she conve-

niently could. But somehow or other, they all contrived to take their seats in very proper order, save and except old Walter himself, who, instead of taking the chair at the top of the table, contrived to establish himself on one side of Kate, after perceiving that Frank had established himself on the other.

"But, how is this, brother?" said the Doctor, in a magnificent tone, that might have filled St. Paul's. "Do you not mean to favour your guests by presiding at your own table?"

"It is the master of the house who must preside at the table," replied the old man; "and here he comes!"

And as he spoke, Henry Harrington the younger entered the room, upon which Walter left his place for a moment, and passing his arm under that of his nephew, led him to the vacant chair at the top of the table; and when with a little gentle violence he had placed him in it, he addressed the party, as he stood behind him, as follows:

"My good friends, I have this day made over Stanton Manor House, and the estate belonging to it, to my nephew Henry, who,

I flatter myself, will do his duty by the premises, better than I have done; for, instead of looking after my fields, I have been ploughing the ocean; and instead of looking after my own pheasants and partridges, I have been amusing myself in taming eagles, and playing with crocodiles. In short, ladies and gentlemen, I think my nephew Henry will make a better English Squire than his uncle; for which reason I now instal him in his post, begging your indulgence for him in his new capacity. Now then," added the old man, retreating to the vacant chair beside Kate, "begin your duties, Squire Harry, by commanding that coffee and tea shall be served forthwith."

Never, perhaps, did the grand pulpit-toned voice of the Doctor make itself heard with better effect than at this moment, when, after waiting till his brother had resumed his place beside Kate, he said:

"My son has been placed by his noble-minded uncle in a position of great responsibility; for, not only has he been suddenly converted from an idle youth, to a rich-landed proprietor; but with all his youthful imperfections on his head, he has to take the place

of one in whose praise every voice is eloquent, and who never forgot the interest of any human being, save his own."

This harangue was listened to with something more than a mere murmur of applause, and the "Hear! hear! hear!" of old Sir John Richardson, the county magistrate, was very cordially responded to by all the gentlemen, and most of the ladies present.

And then the business of the breakfast went on very prosperously; and appeared to be drawing to a conclusion when Mr. Tapley's clerk very noiselessly entered the room, and whispered a few words to his employer. Mr. Tapley looked at old Walter, who gave him what was very evidently an intelligent nod in return, for no other answer seemed required. The clerk retreated with the air of a man who had done his errand, and the result of it was made manifest before the door was again closed; for the said clerk re-entered, followed by no less a personage than Captain Fowler, his usual air of dauntless assurance but little mitigated by his being flanked on each side by a constable. A piercing, and on this occasion a perfectly unaffected, shriek burst from

the lovely widow; and before Lord Goldstable could do more than throw his arm round her, and whisper "What is the matter?" the fair creature was addressed by the prisoner in a voice as far removed from a whisper as possible.

"Mrs. Fowler, by all that's lucky!" exclaimed the ruffian, kissing his hand to her; "I am truly delighted at meeting you at such a critical moment."

"Mr. Harrington," cried the unfortunate lady, addressing herself to Walter, "I place myself under your protection. You are too much a gentleman to permit my being insulted in your house! I have no knowledge whatever of this infamous person, or of the name by which he dares to call me. And I beg, Sir, that he may be taken away before he insults me any farther."

"Fair and softly, my pretty lady!" ejaculated the prisoner. "I am not going to be taken away before we have had a word or two. This lady, who, at present, ladies and gentlemen, chooses, I believe, to call herself Mrs. Fitzjames, has known the time when she was only too happy at being permitted to call herself Mrs. Fowler;

and to say the truth, she had, with the exception, perhaps, of the parson's licence, every right to the name. And do you really fancy woman!" he continued, with almost savage ferocity, "do you really flatter yourself that you are to share a man's fate and fortune as his wife, when your own poverty makes it suit you; and that you are to pass by on the sunny side of the way, when fortune has turned, and he is laid by the leg in the shade? No, my fine madam, we will fall together! You refused to bring me to the acquaintance of your noble spark, when I might have had my share in plucking so fine a pigeon: I was to wait, forsooth, till you were married to him. I am now in custody for a peccadillo that will not hold me long. But how much will you now give me, my dear, for your chance of becoming Lady Goldstable?"

It will easily be understood that every eye was fixed on the prisoner as he uttered this harangue. The first that at its conclusion took another direction, were those of poor, kind-hearted Lord Goldstable; and it was with a gentle and a pitying glance that he turned them towards the beautiful Sophia.

But this pitying glance came too late; for she was gone! It was some minutes before either he, or any one else thought of following her; but when they did, they found that, with her usual cleverness, she had replaced herself in Lord Goldstable's carriage, which had brought her from Doucham, and ordered herself to be driven back thither with all speed.

"Do you forgive me, my dear Lord," said Walter, "for my little plot? But how else could I so readily have convinced you, that this light lady was not worthy of being the wife of so good a man as I believe you to be?"

The blushing young peer only replied by cordially grasping the hand of the old man, of whose friendship he was considerably more proud than of his coronet; but it was not long before he fully expressed to him all the gratitude he felt for his escape. There was only one of the company remaining who did not feel satisfied by the events of the morning; and that one was Lady de Paddington. She felt that she had failed most egregiously in her attempts to turn her wealthy young nephew to good account; and this conviction was very far from being agreeable. But there was another

idea which occurred to her, that was, if possible, more painful still. What if she should find, on returning to Doucham, that Mrs. Fitzjames had departed, leaving their heavy bill unpaid? Unhappy lady! Her prophetic spirit did not deceive her. On returning to Doucham, she found that Mrs. Fitzjames had departed by the express train for London, leaving word that her friend, Lady de Paddington, would be driven to Doucham by her nephew, Lord Goldstable; and that she would settle their joint account on the following day, when she, too, would probably set off for London.

THE END.

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